

Ó hIfearnáin, T. (2009) 'Irish-speaking society and the state'. *The Celtic Languages (2nd Edition)*. Ball, M. & N. Müller (eds.). London & New York: Routledge, 539-586.

## CHAPTER 12

### IRISH-SPEAKING SOCIETY AND THE STATE

*Tadhg Ó hIfearnáin*

#### Demographics and census data

The people of Ireland have a complex relationship with the Irish language. Until the middle of the nineteenth century Irish was widely spoken throughout the country, but even before the watershed of the Great Famine in the 1840s, a linguistic and cultural division of labour had appeared whereby Irish speakers were predominantly found in rural areas and in farming, unskilled or family-based professions socially and economically peripheral to the largely anglophone economy of the growing urban areas, industry and large farms. In the copper mines in the Bérarra peninsula of west Cork, for example (Verling 1996), an area which was very strongly Irish speaking until late in the nineteenth century, all those involved in heavy physical activity were local Irish-speaking Catholics, but the engineers and managers were English-speaking Protestants. It is true that a small number of literate and educated Irish speakers were gradually joining the emerging professional and middle classes throughout the country in this period, but those who retained Irish and passed it on to their children while going through this cultural and economic change were the exceptions. Amhlaoibh Ó Súilleabháin was a school teacher who married into a family with a business in a small town in the south of Co. Kilkenny in the first half of the century. He kept an extensive diary, largely in Irish, from 1827-34 (McGrath 1936, 1937; Ó Drisceoil 2000) in which he

documents his thoughts and activities as a local organizer for Daniel O'Connell's Catholic Emancipation movement and as a member of the middle class in this rural town in a rapidly anglicizing area. He clearly shows how as an Irish speaker he was an exception among his social peers, but that the lower classes and the rural poor in the region were Irish speaking. Like other literate Irish speakers of the period, he was a school teacher who was a son of a school teacher and most probably belonged to one of a restricted number of learned families with roots in the old Gaelic order of the seventeenth century that had carried on the literary tradition by re-applying their inherited skills as scribes, teachers or composers of popular song. There is no evidence that he brought up his own children as Irish speakers, and Irish had disappeared as a native community language in the area within two generations.

In the absence of census data before 1851, we have to rely on reports for government agencies and contemporary estimates, which were made with various agendas, for the number of Irish speakers in the country. Ó Cuív (1951: 77-93) and Hindley (1990: 8-17) estimate from contemporary sources that in 1800 the south-western province of Munster and the western province of Connacht had undoubted Irish-speaking majorities, as did those parts of Ulster which were outside the main areas of seventeenth- to eighteenth-century Protestant settlement, Irish being the most widely used language in Donegal, parts of Tyrone, south Co. Derry, Monaghan, Fermanagh, Armagh and north-east Co. Antrim. The Leinster-Ulster border areas were also majority Irish speaking, as was the south of Leinster as far east as western Co. Wexford. In the small remaining areas, including mid-Leinster to Dublin and the eastern coast, with the possible exception of the most heavily Protestant areas of eastern Ulster, native Irish speakers were still to be

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found, but most probably in communities where English had recently become dominant (see Figure 12.1).

**INSERT FIGURE 12.1 HERE (FULL PAGE)**

The most striking feature of the first half of the nineteenth century is the steep decline in the number of people described as monolingual speakers of Irish (Figure 12.1). All the estimates before the introduction of a language question in the census were compiled with a particular aim in mind, ranging from the challenges for primary education to social development. With the exception of Stokes's estimate in 1799, which was gauging the need for provision of Protestant scripture in Irish for evangelical work, most of the commentators assume that the majority of the Irish-speaking population is also unable to speak English. This monolingual core collapses to the extent that by the third quarter of the century only around 6 per cent of Irish speakers have no English, and these are undoubtedly older people. By the mid-nineteenth century, then, the Irish-speaking population had become a largely a bilingual speech community. Some children continue to be brought up monolingually to this day and more than a century later there are still sizable numbers of people who are more comfortable in Irish than in English, but for at least the past 150 years every Irish-speaking community has had contact with, and been obliged to manage, the two languages.

*Table 12.1* Numbers of Irish speakers in the general population. (Sources: As in Hindley (1990: 15) for 1799–1842 and Census of Population for 1851–2006.)

	<i>Population</i>	<i>Irish speakers</i>	<i>Irish only</i>
1799	5,400,000	2,400,000	800,000

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1812	5,937,856	3,000,000	
1814		2,000,000	
1821	6,801,827	3,740,000	
1835	7,767,401	4,000,000	
1841	8,175,124	4,100,000	
1842		3,000,000	2,700,000
1851	6,552,365	1,524,286	319,602
1861	5,798,564	1,105,536	163,275
1871	5,412,377	817,875	103,562
1881	5,174,836	949,932	64,167
1891	4,704,750	680,174	38,121
1901	4,458,775	641,142	
1911	3,221,823	619,710	
1926	2,802,452	540,802	
1936	2,806,925	666,601	
1946	2,771,657	588,725	
1961	2,635,818	716,420	
1971	2,787,448	789,429	
1981	3,226,467	1,018,413	
1986	3,353,632	1,042,701	
1991	3,367,006	1,095,830	
1996	3,479,648	1,430,205	
2002	3,750,995	1,570,894	
2006	3,956,964	1,656,790	

Table 12.1 presents estimates of the Irish-speaking population from 1799 to 1842, and the census of population returns from then onwards. The first census to ask specifically about Irish was that of 1851, and such a question was asked every ten years from then

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until 1911. There was no census in 1921 due to the political situation in the country. In 1925 Coimisiún na Gaeltachta (1926) undertook a language census in those areas which were believed to be Irish speaking. When the census resumed in 1926 it contained a question on Irish, which was repeated in 1936 and 1946. Meanwhile in Northern Ireland, no question on Irish was asked from the time of Partition in 1922 until 1991. That question was repeated in the most recent census of 2001. Files from the Department of the Taoiseach in the National Archives show that the Central Statistics Office (CSO) had been opposed to asking questions about Irish from the 1940s as they did not believe the information gathered to be useful, and as a result no question was included in the general census for 1956. This was, however, the year in which the Department of the Gaeltacht was set up and as part of the brief to determine the geographical area in which the Department should function, a special report was prepared by the CSO that asked census enumerators to state whether each townland in which they gathered the questionnaires was Irish speaking, partially Irish speaking or not Irish speaking. (The census question resumed in 1961 to 1981, and then in every five-yearly census since: 1986, 1991, 1996, 2002 and 2006. The census of 2001 was postponed until 2002 as part of the national plan to avoid an outbreak of foot and mouth disease which had affected much of the neighbouring United Kingdom that year.) Ó Gliasáin (1996) points out that the nature of the census question has changed to reflect the priorities of the authorities over time. From 1851 to 1871 the question was asked in relation to education levels. The enumerator was asked to say whether the person could 'Read', 'Read and Write', or 'Cannot Read', which – given the context – must refer only to literacy in English, and then to add as a footnote 'Irish' for someone who spoke Irish but not English or the

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words 'Irish and English' to the names of those who could speak both languages. It is widely believed that the numbers of Irish speakers and of monolingual Irish speakers for these early national censuses are greatly underestimated due to the methodology of the data collection. The unmarked nature of English continued in the censuses of 1881–1911, where the words 'Irish' or 'Irish and English' were to be entered next to the names of those who could speak only Irish or who had both languages, spaces next to those who spoke only English being left blank. There was a tendency to continue to underestimate the number of Irish speakers in this way until possibly the late 1890s when Conradh na Gaeilge (The Gaelic League), founded in 1893, became a major cultural and political force in the country, causing more people to have the confidence to claim to be Irish speakers. The 1891 census, which was taken on the cusp of the revival culture but at a time when the vast majority of Irish speakers had acquired the language at home from their parents and communities rather than through the revival movement, is probably the most accurate in giving us a picture of where native Irish was still spoken as the politics and ideologies of ethnic nationalism started to exercise themselves.

The 1926 census was unique in asking whether speakers were native Irish speakers or not, a practice that has not been repeated. The fundamental belief that Irish is the native language of the whole of the Irish nation is enshrined in the language ideology that has dominated political and cultural discourse in independent Ireland and among the nationalist population in the North. This ideology was particularly strong in the years following the foundation of the state, and still has wide currency. Recently, some 14 per cent of Irish people claimed that Irish was their 'mother tongue' in the Eurobarometer survey on the knowledge of languages in the European Union (Eurobarometer 2003),

despite the fact that only some 2 per cent of the population speak it on a daily basis.

From 1926 until 1991 the census asked whether people could speak only Irish, could speak both languages, or could read but not speak Irish, implying a strong passive knowledge acquired through education. In 1996 the question changed to ask whether or not the respondent could speak Irish and if so whether they spoke it 'daily', 'weekly', 'less often' or 'never'. This was further amended in the 2006 census which also asked whether daily speakers also spoke the language outside the education system, as it was felt the actual frequency of usage was being hidden in the school-age cohorts by the fact that Irish is taught daily at school. As opposed to the emphasis on frequency of usage in the southern census of population, the Northern Ireland census of 1991 and 2001 has concentrated on the self-reported language skills of speakers, asking a series of questions yielding statistics that tell us that a respondent: 'Understands spoken Irish but cannot read, write or speak Irish', 'Speaks but does not read or write Irish', 'Speaks and reads but does not write Irish', 'Speaks, reads, writes and understands Irish', or 'Has no knowledge of Irish'.

According to the 2006 census (CSO 2007) in the Republic, 41.9 per cent of the population over three years old claim to be able to speak Irish. In all, 1,203,583 people claim to speak Irish outside the school system and a further 453,207 speak Irish at school. It is probable that up to 80 or even 90 per cent of the population has some knowledge of Irish because they attended school within the state. In 1993 the National Survey on Languages found that 82 per cent of the population claimed some ability to speak Irish, though over half of those said that they only had the odd word or could say a few simple sentences. Similar figures were obtained in the national surveys of 1973 and 1983

(Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin 1994: 5), and have been repeated in numerous opinion polls and market research studies. Despite the amount of passive knowledge and the large number who claim an ability to speak Irish in the census data, in 2006 only 72,148 persons spoke the language daily outside the education system (CSO 2007, calculated from Table 35 and Table 36). The Gaeltacht had a population of 92,777 that year of whom 91,862 were over the age of three and consequently for whom statistics on Irish-language ability and frequency of usage were gathered. Of these, 64,265 (70 per cent) spoke Irish and 22,515 (24.5 per cent) Gaeltacht residents spoke Irish on a daily basis outside the education system. These figures show that although the Gaeltacht has by far the greatest concentration of Irish speakers by ability and by frequency, it accounts for only a little under one-third of daily Irish speakers in the country. There is substantial variation in ability and practice within the Gaeltacht, where some regions are very strongly Irish speaking while others are almost indistinguishable from non-Gaeltacht areas, but for most of the habitual speakers who are dispersed throughout the country the Gaeltacht represents a core language area with which many have family links and longstanding friendships.

In Northern Ireland 167,490 people (10.4 per cent of the resident population) claimed some combination of the language skills set out in the census of 2001. A total of 75,125 claimed to be able to speak, read, write and understand Irish. The figures from the North and from the Republic give different kinds of information, the Northern data showing claimed abilities in productive and passive skills and the Republic's data refining the general ability question with a broad frequency of usage category. Both show the complex relationship of the Irish people to the historical native language of the



country. There are relatively small core groups of habitual speakers, some of whom are concentrated in particular geographical areas, and a very much larger group of people who have a wide range of passive and productive skills in Irish which they use on a less frequent basis. This chapter concentrates on the relationships of the habitual speakers, predominantly in the Gaeltacht, to the status accorded the language nationally, and on the often mismatched ideology and practices that this entails.

### **Irish-language policy**

It is impossible to isolate the question of the Gaeltacht from general Irish-language policy as on an ideological level it has been one of its keystones since the foundation of Saorstát Éireann (The Irish Free State) in 1922. State policy in the Gaeltacht is based on economic planning, be that the development of agriculture before 1956 or the creation of local industry and the attraction of foreign manufacturers since that time. There has been little or no direct planning for the development of the Irish language itself in these regions either at linguistic or social levels, the state having only addressed the substantive language issue when trying to determine where exactly Irish was spoken as the main community language in order to implement its socio-economic policies. The work of the first Gaeltacht Commission in 1925–6 was thus primarily to delimit the Irish-speaking areas as an economic planning zone, something which was repeated in 1956 when the inter-party government of the day created a separate ministry for the Gaeltacht. The 1956 delimitation of the Gaeltacht was carried out internally by the government without setting up any commission of inquiry, a second Coimisiún na Gaeltachta not being convened on these questions until 2000. Although the second government Gaeltacht Commission report (Coimisiún na Gaeltachta 2002) is markedly

different from earlier exercises in many ways, and contains the recommendation that a research unit in sociolinguistics and language planning be created, it too is primarily concerned with status issues, including a new delimitation of the Gaeltacht to include only areas where more than half of the population use Irish on a daily basis. This second Commission clearly understood that the Gaeltacht had slipped from its central position in national Irish-language policy considerations, and so its recommendations 6 and 7 call on the government to set out policies that will affirm the revival of Irish as a national language and to prepare and operate a National Plan for the language with defined aims in which the role of the people of the Gaeltacht will be clear. The Commission thus wants the Gaeltacht to come again to the fore in government language policy. Whether or not this will happen, Gaeltacht issues cannot be separated entirely from any other policy which impacts on language matters. Indeed, as a region with little local empowerment and marginal political weight on the national stage, the Gaeltacht exists as an administrative entity only because the state language ideology believes it should.

Ó Riagáin (1997), in his analysis of its development in the twentieth century, believes Irish-language policy to be concentrated in four fields: education, public administration, language standardization, and the Gaeltacht. Three of these are status planning issues, only standardization being concerned with linguistic corpus planning. To these one should add a fifth area, that of public service broadcasting and the regulation of the private broadcasting sector. As a public service that did not exist in Ireland prior to independence, broadcasting presented the challenge of creating a role for Irish within a new area of policy and practice instead of simply Gaelicizing an already existent structure in the way that education and the public service were to be tackled. These five

fields together are the main areas in which governments can have a direct and immediate influence on language management in the population. Ó Riagáin (1997: 7-27) suggests that these fields have in turn known four broad periods of action, from the first period before political independence where policy was formulated in the aims of the language movement, through three stages since the foundation of the state, reflecting of initial development (1922-48), stagnation and retreat (1948-70) and 'benign neglect' since 1970.

While such an analytical framework is attractive and useful, it is helpful to understand language policy and its effect on the language habits of the population in more fluid terms. National policies towards Irish since the 1920s have fluctuated from taking bold initiatives to having a reactive stance, representing a shifting ideology which although constantly addressing the Irish language and ready to give it a more or less prominent position in state discourse, has also continuously sought to redefine the role allotted to the language in order to reflect what governments perceived to be the prevalent attitudes among the people at the time. Whereas national surveys have consistently shown that few people want the language to die out, that most support its retention in the schools and are generally in favour of government aid to the Gaeltacht and to Irish promotional organizations (Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin 1994), and indeed while most of the English-speaking population ideally would like to be bilingual, the revival of Irish as the principal language of communication in the country is not a concern of the majority of the people, and probably never has been since the major language shift towards English in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In a country where populist consensus politics are to the fore, it cannot be surprising that Irish governments are

rarely under pressure on Irish-language issues from the mass of the population but instead adopt a sympathetic, sometimes paternalistic attitude towards Irish speakers within and outside the Gaeltacht. In these circumstances the history of Irish-language policy and its effect on society is the story of a predominantly English-speaking government and civil service in an overwhelmingly English-dominant state with a central discursive commitment to Irish that manifests itself with varying degrees of engagement over time, often exhibiting formalized forms of cultural and linguistic ideology. The underlying reasoning behind the language policy has been the same throughout the history of the state: There is a desire to enable the whole population to learn and preferably speak Irish, the only indigenous language of the nation once spoken by the great majority, and to stop the Gaeltacht from disappearing entirely as an Irish-speaking or bilingual community.

It is indeed possible to determine distinct periods in Irish-language policy, as Ó Riagáin suggests, but these reflect changes in emphasis as the different strands that have always been present assert themselves. For example, the factors which differentiate the policies of the 1970s from earlier periods, such as the observation of the state's withdrawal from initiatives in language matters and the loosening of the position of compulsory Irish in the school system and public service while continuing to support initiatives from the voluntary sector, were not new. Papers in the National Archives, Department of the Taoiseach files, show that such a policy was being discussed between government departments as early as the 1930s, and that pressure for change actually came from within the public service more than from the general public or from politicians. For example, an internal commission into aspects of the civil service which

sat just ten years after independence, from 1932 to 1935, was against the obligation for new recruits to speak Irish, particularly at higher grades, because its members believed that the rule 'militated against obtaining an adequate supply of good candidates' (*Commission of Inquiry into the Civil Service 1932-35*, 1935: 104), and in a letter from the Local Appointments Commission to the Taoiseach on 11 May 1949 (NA DT, S15811B) which states that 'we are of [the] opinion that the Gaeltacht areas should be revised and redrawn to conform with reality,' the authors did not lose the opportunity to reiterate earlier suggestions that the requirement for public servants to be able to speak Irish be abolished.

What the fluidity of the situation highlights is that whereas governments have rarely changed their general policies because they perceived no demands from the majority to do so, they frequently change the details or emphasis after lobbying articulated by small groups who may be concerned with only one aspect of the language policy, particularly educationalists and civil servants, many of whom are actually employees of the state. Indeed, it is easy to see that if the state has broad policy themes which enjoy general support rather than explicit rules defined by statute, it is only small interest groups that have the motivation to tackle it and press for change. These groups, be they in favour of or against aspects of language policy, play a role disproportionate to their size in the conduct of the state's action on language matters.

As an alternative to Ó Riagáin (1997), especially from the perspective of the Gaeltacht, one can see that there have been not three but four periods in Irish-language policy since the foundation of the state in 1922. Although the dates might be different, the thrust of the two earlier periods corresponds to those first identified by Ó Riagáin. The period

from the early 1970s was not, however, one of 'benign neglect' but a repositioning of the language ideology followed by an emergence of new explicit actions since the early 1990s with regard to broadcasting, education, legal status in Ireland and the European Union, and the future of the Gaeltacht, all showing that the state now thinks of Irish in terms of a minority language-group issue on the one hand and as a cultural heritage issue on the other. These four phases do not represent changes in essential policy priorities, but rather the emergence of the dominance of different strands and nuances which have always animated the state's conduct, reflecting the constant central ideology but expressing it in ways that were most acceptable to the people in each period. The following discussion thus sets out four periods of language management since the foundation of the state: 1. 1922–56: The foundations of Irish-language management; 2. 1956–72: Redefinitions of the role of the state; 3. 1973–92 Consultation and reacting to pressure from the roots; 4. 1992 to the present: Linguistic minority rights and heritage. In each case the position of Irish in society is discussed in the context of the major changes in the actions of the national collective, being the actions of the state and the opinions and deeds of the Irish- and non-Irish-speaking populations.

### **1 1922–56: The foundations of Irish-language management**

There is an underlying paradox in Irish-language society that permeates all aspects of language management. Irish is a minority language in Ireland yet does not have any formal kind of minority status, the state interpreting it instead as the real native language of all Irish citizens, as if it had been forgotten and is waiting to be liberated through the will of the people and action of their government. Three hundred years ago very few people in the country could speak any English at all, but the rapid language

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shift that occurred during recent centuries left only about 18 per cent of the population able to speak Irish at the beginning of the twentieth century. Thus, although Irish is the only 'native' language spoken in Ireland, by the time the Irish Free State gained its independence from the United Kingdom, the majority of the 'native' people no longer spoke it. As Ireland is a democracy, this means that Irish-language policy is, and in effect has always been, determined by, or at least with the acquiescence of, those who do not actively speak it.

Unlike state or local government-assisted attempts to revive minoritized languages in other European countries, in Ireland it has been state strategy to resolve the question of the language's minority situation by seeking to establish Irish as the 'national language'. Throughout history other polities have also established a minority language or a particular dialectal variety as that state's official language, as in the definition and promotion of standard Italian in Italy for example, or in de-colonized countries in Africa, Asia and Oceania that chose one local language, for example a form of Swahili or a pidgin, to become the state language. However, in all of these circumstances the chosen language or dialectal variety was that of a culturally or economically dominant minority, most frequently both. Apart from a small group of intellectuals, in 1920s Ireland as a result of two and a half centuries of social, economic and political marginalization, speakers of Irish were almost exclusively restricted to the lowest socio-economic sector in society, the rural poor. Indeed, it was not really the small number of speakers of Irish which was the major factor in this first period of activity on the language issue by the Irish state, but the fact that there were so few people whose main language was Irish in any influential roles within social, political, economic, educational, administrative or

broadcasting fields. There were very few native Irish speakers in the main political parties or employed in the public service until much later. Indeed, although opinions on the actual status of Irish and on its decline were gathered from Irish speakers during the work of Coimisiún na Gaeltachta from 1925 to 1926, and again during the public hearings of An Coimisiún um Athbheochan na Gaeilge (the Commission on the Restoration of the Irish Language) from 1958 to 1963, at no stage until the last quarter of the twentieth century were the Irish-speaking people of the Gaeltacht centrally involved in the decision-making process in regard to language matters that has so deeply affected the life of their communities.

Whereas many years of language policies have not resulted in the restoration of Irish as the majority language, it was during this early period that they moulded the way in which Irish people regard the language and caused them to gradually modify their view of the nature of bilingualism. They also fundamentally changed the linguistic division of labour. As a result, Irish speakers are now to be found at all levels of society and in all parts of the country. While the Irish-speaking communities in the Gaeltacht may still contain a number of the rural poor, the 2006 census reveals the profile of Irish speakers in wider society to be strongest in the urban educated middle-income bracket. It is clear that from a sociolinguistic perspective it is the ethos reflected in the national policy, and the broadly supportive attitude of the majority who are not Irish speakers, that slowed if not entirely stopped decline in the Irish-speaking parts of the national territory, and makes it acceptable to spend large sums of money on a language which is habitually spoken by only such a small proportion of the population. Significant majorities of the population in all three national surveys on language attitudes over the past thirty years



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(Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliaáin 1994) seem relatively comfortable with the current situation, and so in a country where populism and consensus frequently determine government policy, there is little pressure for change in this respect, despite obvious shortcomings from the point of view of those interested in reversing language shift. This situation of widespread linguistic awareness and passive support for the status of the language on the national level has its roots in the actions taken in this first stage.

### **Gaelicizing the administration**

The body of documentary evidence in the National Archives, Oireachtas debates, and published literature all point to a constant dialectic in Irish government between government ministers, politicians and popular opinion on one hand who are in favour of Irish-language revival on a philosophical level and the corps of the state's public administration – the civil service – on the other, who have to a large extent successfully resisted incorporation into the dominant ideology. Whereas politicians and the public might have been in favour of Irish, they did not have any requirement to speak it, of course, whereas this would not have been a choice for state employees, who frequently questioned the rationale and aims of such a policy. Many schemes to Gaelicize the Irish civil service, some through obligation and others by persuasion, were implemented during this first formative period. Most of them have been withdrawn or have fallen into abeyance since. The first of the compulsory elements came in 1925 when Irish was made necessary for open recruitment competitions to join the service at the general level, a policy that was later reinforced between 1927 and 1931 when the civil service entrance examination included elements in written and spoken Irish. From that time a test in spoken Irish, intended to be at a higher or professional standard, was also to be taken by

all candidates for permanent positions in the second year of their probationary period.

In 1937 language tests were introduced for all those who had spent five years in the service to ensure that they were able to carry out their official functions and duties in Irish, and in 1945 promotion from the general or clerical grade required an examination in Irish. Although professional and technical grades in the civil service were never obliged to have a knowledge of Irish unless it was immediately relevant to their post, from 1935 onwards priority was given to candidates for employment or promotion who had a knowledge of Irish but were otherwise equally qualified. It is not surprising that governments of this period tried to establish Irish usage among their own employees. It was one of the few areas outside education where they could have a direct influence on language choice. Even in the education sector, as discussed below, the state could dictate policy only in the primary sector and in teacher training. Ó Riagáin (1997: 18) points out additionally that at the time nearly 60 per cent of the labour force were employed in agriculture, mostly on family-run farms, and citing Breen et al. (1990: 55) says that probably half of the workforce were self-employed, employed within family-run enterprises, or were employers themselves. In such circumstances the civil service was one of only a few areas which could provide new Irish-speaking middle-class professionals. For a number of reasons, this relatively robust policy met with astonishingly little success in Gaelicizing the civil service.

The 1920s were a period of great turbulence in Ireland. The foundation of the independent state was followed by a bitter civil war, with the first peaceful transition of power from the Pro-Treaty parties which ran the Free State throughout the 1920s to Fianna Fáil, the party formed out of the main group who had opposed the Treaty, after

the general election of 1932. Existing institutions were disturbed as little as possible by the government under W. T. Cosgrave from 1923 until 1932. During this early period many of the civil servants who had been in post during the British regime remained in their positions. Despite the official policy, little pressure was put on those already employed or on those in professional or technical grades to adopt Irish. As the civil service is a pyramid structure with fewer employees at the higher levels than at the bottom, and as it had been long established, the English-speaking environment was naturally always stronger in the upper levels. Any new Irish-speaking recruit ascending the promotional scales would be unlikely to have a lasting effect on these conservative strata. The importance of Gaelicizing the civil service, and the failure to do so in any meaningful way, is apparent from the Commission on the Restoration of the Irish Language report, which tries to put a positive gloss on what had been achieved by 1959, despite pointing out that the Irish examinations for joining or being promoted within the civil service actually applied only to about one-third of the total personnel, mostly in the clerical and general grades:

Owing to the large numbers employed in the public service (28,000, of whom half work in the Capital), and the wide range of its dealings with the public, the language revival can be extensively aided or retarded by the greater or lesser use of Irish on the part of its personnel. When a native government assumed control of it in 1922, the machinery of administration remained substantially as it had under the British regime, and it was only with the lapse of time that a nucleus of a few thousand public servants possessing a competent knowledge of the national language was built up.

. . . Thus, by 1959, almost 4,000 (14% of the total) were recorded as having a fluent knowledge of the language and a further 14,000 (50% of the total) had a reading knowledge of it.

(Coimisiún um Athbheochan na Gaeilge 1963: 22)

Indeed, even if there was as much as 14 per cent of the Public Service able to speak Irish, the same source reveals that leaving aside the Irish-using sections, in 1956 less than 2 per cent of official business was conducted in Irish, while the voluntary use of Irish outside those sections was insignificant. The Commission on the Restoration of the Irish Language conducted its own survey on the subject at the beginning of 1961 and found the position not to be appreciably different.

Less than 0.5% of the existing public servants are employed in sections in which at least three-quarters of the work is in Irish, and less than 3% in sections in which between one-quarter and three-quarters of the work is in Irish. Indeed, outside the Department of the Gaeltacht, of which the personnel is small in number, and, to a lesser extent, the Department of Education, the amount of Irish used is negligible.

(Coimisiún um Athbheochan na Gaeilge 1963: 23)

The lack of opportunity to use Irish in the civil service and the reluctance of civil servants to use what Irish they had were a constant source of concern to those pushing the status of Irish. In response to this and in addition to the obligation to have a working knowledge of Irish, Cumann Gaodhlach na Stát-Seirbhíse [The civil service Irish Society] was set up in 1926 and organized cultural and social events in Irish. In 1933, following

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recommendations from Coiste Gaeltachta na Comh-Aireachta [The Cabinet Gaeltacht Committee] that civil servants be given an extra week's paid leave per year if they were to spend two weeks in the Gaeltacht on a recognized language course, the Department of Finance actually allowed them an extra week of unpaid leave to attend a two-week course. Although the scheme was built on a sweetener, that the politicians thought this to be of potential benefit is evidence for a slightly more positive attitude towards Irish on the part of civil servants. This was markedly different from the distrust openly displayed by the governments of the 1920s which saw civil servants as a fifth column in language matters and a potential source of Anglicization of the Gaeltacht. In the well-known exclamation by Earnán de Blaghd, Minister for Finance from 1923 until 1932, when the idea of sending civil servants to the Gaeltacht was first mooted: 'If Civil Servants assemble or are assembled in great numbers in the Gaeltacht, they should be dispersed, if necessary, by machine guns' (Kelly 2002: 105).

The civil service thwarted many initiatives to gaelicize it from within. Coiste Gaeltachta na Comh-Aireachta was founded in June 1933 with the purpose of finding ways to improve both the economy of the Gaeltacht and the position of Irish in the public service generally. They made their recommendations on 24 October of that year, and these included reserving posts in secretarial and clerical functions. Although this was not particularly radical, all its recommendations met with the same fate being passed from body to body until they were either watered down or abandoned:

Cuireadh faoi bhráid na Roinne Airgeadais iad, uaithi sin go dtí an Coiste Idir-Rannach i dtaobh na Gaeilge sa Státseirbhís agus uaidh sin go dtí an Coimisiún i dtaobh na Gaeilge sa Státseirbhís. Tá samplaí eile den phróiseas seo ann go

bhféadfadh moltaí áirithe ciorcal iomlán timpeall a dhéanamh idir ranna éagsúla stáit. Ba ghnách leis an Roinn Airgeadais dearcadh coiméadach a ghlacadh, is léir.

[They were submitted to the Department for Finance, from there to the Inter-Departmental Committee on Irish in the civil service and from there to the Commission on Irish in the civil service. There are other examples of this process whereby particular recommendations could make a full circle round various government departments. It is obvious that the Department of Finance usually held a conservative view.]

(Ó Riain 1994: 38)

The last major effort in this period to bring Irish into the operations of the civil service was the setting up of another internal commission, Coimisiún i dtaobh na Gaeilge sa Státseirbhís [The Commission on Irish in the civil service], on 13 November 1936 with a brief to devise the structures that would allow the planning necessary to spread the use of Irish in the public service, and to observe the implementation of such plans. The commission's secretary made visits to every office in Dublin and Galway and issued ten reports from the beginning of 1937 until 1939, when those working in the commission were transferred to other duties because of what was in Ireland called the 'Emergency' of 1939-45 (Ó Riain 1994: 38-9).

The dominance of senior staff employed since the pre-independence era is only one of the possible explanatory factors for the way in which political efforts at Gaelicization of the Public service were frustrated. Ó Riain (1994) gives examples of how individuals who were once Irish-language activists were moulded into the dominant view within

the public service, and shows how this mould was never really broken in favour of a new vision. The civil service seems to have always resisted any role in planning for the status of Irish, and resented its imposition. This is in part due to the inertia of any large organization run by the state, but can also be attributed to some of the otherwise commendable values inherited by the service from Britain, whereby their role was to serve the public, who were predominantly English-speaking by this stage, rather than be part of state planning. In the 1920s and 1930s Irish was the primary language of a group of the rural poor and of a small number of mostly urban revival speakers. Domains of usage in trades and professions, academia, and all aspects of politics and public administration had not yet been reclaimed for Irish. However weak the public service may have been in its adoption of Irish, even the low percentages of ability achieved in the first twenty years were ahead of the general population. Ignoring their role in language status planning generally and the fact that Gaelicizing the service was only part of a plan for general revival, civil servants frequently complained that they were being asked to provide services for which there were little or no demand. The minority who came through the new recruitment system were in fact among the most literate Irish speakers in the country. The majority of native speakers from the Gaeltacht regions only became generally literate in the language along with the rest of the population through the schools. Nevertheless, the civil service both nationally and locally is part of one of the most important power structures in the state. The public service is the face of government for the individual. The inability of government to normalize the position of Irish among its own employees and to provide all services, orally as well as in written form, undermines any efforts to achieve full Irish-language literacy and reconquest of

sociolinguistic domains in the Gaeltacht itself as there was then, and remains now, a tacit acceptance there that one must conduct business with the state and all semi-state bodies and agencies in English unless dealing directly with Irish-language affairs. The civil service argument for a lack of demand for Irish-language services thus becomes a self-fulfilling fact, state employees in reality relying on the English-language abilities of Irish speakers.

## **Education**

Societal bilingualism in Ireland, particularly in the nineteenth century just prior to independence for the greater part of the country, was a transitional state and can be characterized as a rapid process of language replacement as Irish-speaking communities became absorbed into the major market economy, changing in one or two generations from monolingual Irish to monolingual English speakers. The average Irish person's experience of bilingualism was thus that it was inherently unstable and that linguistic co-existence was probably not possible, and possibly not even desirable; facts that coloured both state policies on language and the attitude towards Irish of substantial parts of the population. It seems clear that the new state's ideology alone, driven by romantic nationalism, was not enough to make a population which had previously, albeit subconsciously, decided to make the shift to English reverse their decision.

In the early education policy, announced almost immediately upon independence as described in detail by Ó Buachalla (1988) and Kelly (2002), the state did not try to establish popular bilingualism but instead wanted Irish to replace English gradually as the language of instruction. However, neither the majority of the pupils nor their teachers were initially able to comply having been trained during the pre-independence



regime and having undergone the popular language shift to English. To remedy this situation Irish gradually became the medium of instruction in the state's primary teacher training colleges, and four secondary level preparatory schools were established in the Gaeltacht to feed into the teacher training sector. The number of subjects taught at primary school was reduced to allow for teachers' competence to improve, and the new teachers from the Irish-medium colleges were gradually brought in to educate the younger children. The policy had noticeable effects by the mid-1930s, when 25 to 30 per cent of schools were in effect Irish-medium immersion schools for children whose home language was English. A further 25 per cent taught more than two subjects through the medium of Irish, meaning that more than half of the state's schools had become to some extent Irish-medium. The four teacher training colleges, St Patrick's Training College, Drumcondra and Our Lady of Mercy Training College, Carysfort, both in Dublin, Mary Immaculate College of Education, Limerick and the de la Salle College in Waterford had all become almost entirely Irish-medium institutions by the 1930s (Kelly 2002: 68-73).

The coláistí ullmhúcháin [preparatory colleges] were a central part of the education policy from their foundation in 1927 through to their running down from 1939 and eventual closure in 1960. They fulfilled a number of purposes with regard to language policy, if not necessarily towards general educational achievement. They were designed to be Irish-medium boarding schools whose pupils were to go on to be trained as primary school teachers in the training colleges. The Department of Education decided to create these special schools in 1926, and the first three of the seven schools, three for Catholic boys, three for Catholic girls and a mixed one for Protestants, opened in 1927. All were in operation by 1930. As Kelly (2002) has calculated, they originally catered for

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about 25 pupils each, but by the early 1930s had a running total of between 550 and 600 pupils enrolled. No new students were accepted into the colleges from 1939 until 1942, because the number of qualified teachers was already more than needed. It was during this period that the fate of the colleges was sealed when the necessity to have special colleges of this nature was questioned given the apparent success of the ordinary schools in providing quality applicants to the teacher training colleges. On re-opening their doors they only slowly filled up anew before the Minister for Education announced, in 1958, that entry to teacher training would be by Leaving Certificate results and interview only, and no places would be guaranteed for pupils from the coláistí ullmhúcháin. They were eventually closed or converted to ordinary secondary schools in 1960.

During their existence they played an important role in bringing the language revival movement into close contact with the native Irish-speaking population, while for the first time setting an attainable professional goal that was directly linked to their home language for young Gaeltacht people. Five of the seven preparatory colleges were located in the Gaeltacht regions and so provided a visible focus for communities that were quite isolated at the time, as well as the ancillary jobs associated with any institution. In the south-western province of Munster, Coláiste Íde was in the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht in Kerry and Coláiste na Mumhan, although originally set up in 1928 in Mallow in Co. Cork, moved to Coláiste Íosagáin in Baile Bhuirne in the west Cork Gaeltacht area of Múscraí in 1940. The western province of Connacht was host to Coláiste Éinde in na Forbacha, in the Cois Fharraige Gaeltacht region of Co. Galway and Coláiste Mhuire in Tuar Mhic Éadaigh in southern Mayo. In Ulster, the town of Fál

Carrach in the Donegal Gaeltacht was home to Coláiste Bhríde. It is widely believed to this day, particularly outside the Gaeltacht and especially in the English-dominant areas bordering it, that places in these colleges were solely for Gaeltacht pupils. A source of some resentment and subject of attacks from those against the language revival, it was not true. In fact only about one quarter of places were in any way reserved for pupils from the Fíor-Ghaeltacht as half of the places were reserved for candidates who achieved the highest grade possible in the oral Irish examination, and of those, half were reserved for the Gaeltacht applicants. Nevertheless, Gaeltacht primary teachers were encouraged to put forward their best students and even received financial rewards if their pupils were accepted or showed promise in the entrance examination. In most years well over a quarter of the students were indeed from the Gaeltacht. Successful candidates from low-income families also received a small subsistence grant to encourage them to complete their studies. These were important privileges at a time when secondary level education was generally neither free nor universally available. The students spent four years in these preparatory colleges before going on to the training colleges. The coláistí ullmhúcháin have undoubtedly had a lasting effect on the Gaeltacht population. They introduced individuals and families in the Gaeltacht and in rural areas generally to secondary and further education during a period when this was more often the reserve of a more privileged class. They also began a trend for Gaeltacht people to become involved in the teaching profession, not just specializing in Irish language and literature, which has lasted well through the decline of the coláistí ullmhúcháin and through to the present day when Irish is no longer a compulsory part of the Leaving Certificate exam and is no longer a required subject for entry into the

public service nor to some of the state's third level institutions.

The state was directly responsible only for the compulsory primary education sector in this period, and so could not directly determine the ethos for secondary schools.

However, a 'carrot' rather than 'stick' policy to encourage Irish at the secondary level was instigated with a pass in Irish in the national Intermediate and Leaving Certificate school examinations being mandatory, as it was for entry to the colleges of the National University and teacher training colleges, as well as lower grades in the public service.

The state, or at least the *classe politique* if not the body of the civil service, set great store by the ability of the schools to teach fluency in Irish to their pupils and so enthuse them with a love for the language that would make them choose to use it once they graduated. This aim was articulated from well before independence and was developed during the first phase of language policy, which ended around 1956 with the formal definition of the Gaeltacht. The schools had evidently been achieving significant results and with some enthusiasm: the numbers claiming in the census to know Irish, were taking a steady climb. Perhaps the qualified success in education only further highlighted the frustration felt by the politicians over their inability to convert the public service mind-set to encourage the use of Irish, and so engendered even more emphasis on schooling. Éamon de Valera, one of the key figures in twentieth-century Irish politics and staunch supporter of Gaelicization, exemplifies this in a letter dated 30 October to his Fianna Fáil party colleagues at the 1952 Ard-Fheis [annual conference]. He was Taoiseach at the time, but was unable to attend because he was in Utrecht, the Netherlands. The letter is bilingual, and the following are extracts from the English text only:

During the last 30 years much has been done to provide the mechanical aids by which anyone who desires to do so can learn the national language and equip himself to use it for the general purposes of ordinary life . . .

. . . the objective . . . general use of the language can only come from the schools.

. . . For some years I have felt that [a] stocktaking was necessary, but hesitated to say so in public as reflection on new ways would be seized by those who disliked the language as defeat.

. . . but I am now convinced that this must happen.

. . . Emphasis should now be on speech.

(National Archives, Department of the Taoiseach, S1380A/S15562)

As well as its emphasis on the responsibility of schools, the letter displays an attitude against compulsion to use Irish in daily life, instead saying that the role of the state is to provide society with the structures that will enable the individual to learn and choose to use Irish if so desired. It also admits to disappointment that not many were choosing to do so, and that some reconsideration would be necessary.

Although the promotion of Irish enjoys cross-party support in the main, the attitude towards state intervention in the sociolinguistic situation has varied in important details over time. Fianna Fáil were not returned to office during the period 1948-51 and again between the 1954 general election and 1957, but were replaced by the Inter-Party Governments headed by Fine Gael. The first of these consisted of Fine Gael, the Labour Party (including the temporary break away National Labour), Clann na Talmhan (focussing on small farmers's issues) and Clann na Poblachta. Clann na Poblachta, which

united socialists and republican strands as an alternative to Fianna Fáil hegemony was on the rise, and it was arguably to stop the momentum it had gained in bi-elections that Fianna Fáil called the snap general election in 1948. There were tensions between the liberal wing and more nationalist/republican wing from early on in the party, and although they all wanted to oust Fianna Fáil, in the long-term they were not comfortable with supporting a Fine Gael-led government either. In a compromise with Clann na Poblachta, the Inter-Party government was led by Fine Gael's John A. Costello, rather than their party leader, General Richard Mulcahy, who many republicans resented because of his actions on behalf of the Free State government during the Civil War. Many believed that the Inter-Party Governments had less than solid credentials on the language revival issue and did not want to carry it forward. The question had come to a head during the first three years of the Inter-Party Government. In its October 1949 edition the Irish-language magazine *Comhar* had reported that the President of University College Dublin, the biggest university in the country, was opposed to the state's Irish-language policies and had said that in fact nobody in the government believed in the Revival either. This led to the following exchange in the Dáil which subtly underlines some of the emerging differences between the political parties despite the denial of any change by the Taoiseach of the day:

**Mr. Con Lehane (Clann na Poblachta, Dublin South-Central)** asked the Taoiseach whether, in view of published statements to the effect that neither the present Government nor any of its predecessors believe in the revival of the Irish language and that Ministers who are public advocates for the language say privately that its revival is impossible, he proposes, on behalf of the Government,

to take any steps to repudiate the imputations of bad faith implicit in the statements.

**The Taoiseach (John Aloysius Costello, Fine Gael):** I have consulted the person who, according to the published report to which the Deputy evidently refers, is alleged to have made the statements mentioned in the question, and I have been assured by him that the report is a garbled version of what he said and that he entirely repudiates it. I feel, therefore, that it is scarcely incumbent on me to make any statement arising out of the report; but, nevertheless, I welcome the opportunity afforded to me by the Deputy's question of saying that the Government consider the revival of the Irish language to be a primary and fundamental aim of national policy. We have not deviated from the pursuance of that aim since we assumed office, and we have no intention of deviating from it in the future.

**Con Lehane (Clann na Poblachta):** Would the Taoiseach agree that it is time that the anti-Irish language attitude of mind displayed by the authorities of University College, Dublin, was radically altered so that the Government's policy may be more actively effected?

**The Taoiseach:** I do not know that there is any foundation for the allegation made by the Deputy, but I think I should say that I ought not to be asked to answer in this House for what is done or said outside the House. Government

policy can be questioned in the House, but I have no responsibility for matters not directly related to Government policy.

**Éamon Kissane (Fianna Fáil, Kerry North):** Is it still the opinion of the Clann na Poblachta Party that teaching through the medium of Irish is mental murder?

**Con Lehane (Clann na Poblachta):** That was never the opinion of Clann na Poblachta.

**Seán MacEntee (Fianna Fáil, Dublin South-East):** It certainly was before the election.

(Dáil Éireann, Volume 118. 6 December 1949)

The suspicion that something was afoot to change state policy and that it was not being shared openly with Deputies continued throughout that government. Nearly a year later the Taoiseach refused to set up an independent or cross-party committee on the revival of Irish, insisting that, 'So far as the revival of Irish can be assisted by state action, I am satisfied that the appropriate instrument for that purpose is the Government' (Dáil Éireann, Volume 123. 15 November 1950).

When the Inter-Party Government returned to power in May 1954 it published an agreed Programme for Government, which contained the commitment to establish a separate ministry for the Gaeltacht, rather than have Gaeltacht and Irish-language matters spread across all areas of policy and governance. Sensing that change was in the air and seeking assurances about the government's commitment to Irish in education, on



17 May 1955 in Dáil Éireann, Éamon de Valera asked General Richard Mulcahy, now Minister for Education:

If he will state, in as precise terms as possible, so that there may be an end to uninformed criticism in the matter, what are his Department's regulations and attitude with regard to the teaching and use of the Irish language in primary schools; and if he will indicate the extent to which actual practice is in conformity with departmental views and directives.

(Dáil Éireann, Volume 150. 17 May 1955)

General Mulcahy gave a very extensive reply, which sought to reaffirm the general position of Irish in education at the end of this first phase of language policy. He identified the ideology of the majority consensus in his opening remarks, in saying 'The attitude of my Department with regard to the teaching of the Irish language by primary schools derives from the national consciousness', before giving a list of all the recommendations, Public Notices, Circulars and Acts that were still in operation. The general situation is summarized in points 5 and 6 of the Minister's reply:

5. Irish itself is, therefore, an obligatory subject in every national school and the use of Irish as a teaching medium in the schools is determined by certain specified conditions according to the particular circumstances of each school. The amount of time devoted each day or each week to the teaching of Irish and the use of Irish as a teaching medium varies according to the size of the school, the number of teachers, and the particular circumstances of the school.

6. With regard to the Deputy's inquiry as to the extent to which actual practice is in conformity with departmental views and directives, I should like to say that in my opinion any lack of conformity that there is arises from a failure, or perhaps, I should say, an inability, to realise the aims and objectives of the policy indicated in the different documents to which I have referred, rather than from an effort to achieve these aims in cases where the circumstances do not warrant their implementation.

The Department's inspectors encourage the extension of the use of Irish as a teaching medium wherever the conditions permitting of its use are fulfilled, but owing to a certain atmosphere of thoughtlessness and apathy outside the school progress in the restoration of Irish as the medium of instruction and intercourse frequently falls short of the stated objective.

If the expressed national policy in relation to the Irish language is to be realised, the work of the schools must receive a due measure of encouragement and support from the general public outside the school.

This is not to say that considerable progress in the revival of the language has not been achieved. For instance, the latest available figures show that of a total of 4,876 national schools, Irish was the sole medium in 490, of which 179 were in the Fíor-Ghaeltacht and 183 (including schools solely for infants) in the English-speaking districts. In another 1,901 schools Irish was the sole medium of instruction in two or more consecutive classes or standards but not throughout the whole school, and in a further 2,459 schools Irish was the medium of instruction in some class or classes and/or in some subject or subjects other than

Irish. These three groups together give a total of 4,850 which means that there were only 26 schools in which all subjects were taught through English. But it is necessary to mention that the use of Irish in infants' classes influences these figures to a considerable extent.

(Dáil Éireann, Volume 150. 17 May 1955)

In re-emphasizing the importance that the government attached to compulsory Irish as a subject and Irish-medium education for the language revival, and in citing some of the achievements in the educational sector, the Minister's reply nonetheless has a slightly hollow ring to it. It refers to the inability to achieve the policies' objectives, and the apathy towards the revival outside the school, which in turn had an adverse effect on the schools' possible achievements. This statement was made at a time when some 10 per cent of schools were teaching solely through Irish, 39 per cent teaching at least half the curriculum through Irish and only 0.5 per cent still using English only. Such figures could not have been achieved in the face of popular opposition to the policy, and despite the protestations of a small minority, there is little to show that the people were seeking any change. The decline in the presence of Irish in schools from this peak in the 1950s happened not through active conflict or antagonism but because the founding language ideology of the state was running into the reality that while the people whose parents and grandparents had turned to English did want to learn Irish anew and have their children speak it, they did not want to reject English. State language ideology promoted Irish revival and monolingual schooling. The lack of any planning for societal bilingualism and, in contrast, for particular domains for public usage of Irish beyond school and symbolic nationalism undermined the fundamental philosophy as it forced

an unnecessary and unreasonable conflict between Irish and English, which after centuries of language shift away from Irish and the reinforcing links of family and friends in the English-speaking world, Irish would never win. As the language ideology was essential to Irish statehood it had to remain, but the foundations for the position of the Irish language in modern Irish society having been laid, the enthusiasm for revival simply seems to have lost steam.

One of the salient differences between the Irish and Hebrew language revivals (Ó Laoire 1999) is that those who chose to speak revived Hebrew rarely had to contend with their parents and grandparents who spoke another language, either because they had sadly been killed during the Second World War, or simply because they were very far away from the Middle East. Hebrew also offered a new lingua franca to Jews from many different language backgrounds. In Ireland not only were the older generations often still present and often living in the same house or neighbourhood, but they carried with them the psychological trauma of having themselves, or a recent generation of their family, become English-dominant speakers, rejecting Irish even if not on a conscious level. Accepting or even welcoming Irish at school, even as a medium of instruction, was not the same as making the effort essential to reverse the language shift and actually spend one's life as a language-learner trying to annul the decision of one's antecedents. As long as the state ideology did not attack their personal confidence and sense of worth, the people were in favour of it. The majority continue to be so.

Some of these popular attitudes were summed up neatly in an openly nationalist editorial in the *Leader* newspaper in 1944, commenting on a debate on language policy between Éamon de Valera and General Mulcahy in Ennis, Co. Clare, and on what

groups within the population the editor saw opposing the language revival. The editor believed that both Catholic and Protestant citizens who opposed the revival would support it if they thought it would succeed. It was the credibility of the planning which was the problem and the absence of positive arguments for revival beyond the national cause:

Practical opposition to the saving of Irish would continue regardless. Opposition is from three groups:

1. Fanatical, quiet opposition from a serious group of unwavering enemies of Irish nationality of disproportionate influence vis à vis their number.
2. Shoneen Catholics. A substantial group who instead of national feeling have inordinate admiration for Great Britain and the United States of America and who think it would be a great advance if all the peoples of the world dropped their own languages and adopted English. But they would not fight against Irish.
3. Fluctuating opposition to the revival of Irish from people who would really prefer to have Irish saved but who resent anything that even in the slightest degree affects their interests or self-esteem.

In our opinion government must always be on the alert to ensure that existing minority opposition is never by ill-conceived reasons or by over-haste swollen into majority opposition . . . . But there is no need for the snail-like inaction as Mr. De Valera's government has heretofore been.

(*Leader*, 14 October 1944)

By 1956 all the main strands of state action on Irish had been designed and

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implemented, and the results were mixed. The ideology that had been thus expounded over the first 34 years of the state's existence was the philosophical basis for all that followed, but having highlighted its own limitations led to some consolidation of action in the Gaeltacht and not a little torpidity in the rest of the country.

## **2 1956–72: Redefinitions of the role of the state**

The 1950s saw substantial change and innovation in the way the state interacted with the population with regard to Irish. It was during this period that the Gaeltacht was first defined by statute in order to set out the geographical area under the new Department of the Gaeltacht. The handbook of the standardized language, *An Caighdeán Oifigiúil*, was also published. As Ó Riagáin (1997) has argued, the state policy in Irish status planning and education went into stagnation and retreat, but this period also saw the rise of new forms of Irish-language pressure groups in the Gaeltacht in particular.

### **The Gaeltacht**

The Irish word *Gaeltacht* is a collective noun which has both a concrete and an abstract meaning. The standard Irish-English Dictionary (Ó Dónaill 1977: 601) defines it as 'Irishry', 'Irish (-speaking) people', and 'Irish-speaking area'. An earlier, but still current dictionary (Dinneen 1927: 507) goes into slightly more detail, including 'the state of being Irish or Scotch; Gaeldom, Irishry, the native race of Ireland; Irish-speaking district or districts'.

Historically, as in Dinneen's definition, the word has no plural, there being only one Gaelic people and one region where they live, albeit not a contiguous one. However, contemporary use of the word to define spatially separated Irish-speaking communities

within the Irish State has led to the increasing use of a plural form, *Gaeltachtaí* or 'Gaeltachts', as if each area were a separate unit. There is no doubt, least of all in the minds of the different Gaeltacht communities themselves, that there are important cultural differences between the designated Gaeltacht territories, arising from their varied social and economic histories, geographical dissimilarities, dialect differences, and the relative strength of Irish as a community language in each place. Nevertheless, the plural form reflects the concrete association of the word with the state's administration of distinct geographically defined parts of the country rather than an affirmation of local cultural identities, and as such is simply an adaptation of English-language usage. Figure 12.2 shows the geographical extent of the Gaeltacht as defined by Statutory Instrument in 1956 and augmented by those of 1967, 1974 and 1982.

**INSERT FIGURE 12.2 HERE**

Even if Hindley (1990: 208) was ever correct in the opinion he formed while visiting the Gaeltacht in the 1960s and 1970s that 'People think of themselves as Donegal people, Kerry folk, Cork people, people from Mayo or Galway, but never as Gaeltacht people', it is certainly no longer the case. People will always have multiple identities, but one of them is belonging to the Gaeltacht, both as a region and as a community. Of many unifying factors which promote a common identity among all Gaeltacht people, three institutions have been mentioned time and again in my own fieldwork: *Údarás na Gaeltachta*, the Gaeltacht development authority, seventeen of whose twenty members are elected from the various regions; *Raidió na Gaeltachta*, which the people clearly feel to be their own although it is a national radio station; and, especially among the younger

age groups, Comórtas Peile na Gaeltachta, the annual inter-Gaeltacht Gaelic football competition. These are organizations which the Gaeltacht people either set up themselves or in which they participate directly, displaying a strong sense of collective identity.

In general, the traditional understanding of the Gaeltacht as a community and the use of the word by the state to mean particular districts co-exist harmoniously. Occasionally, however, the two concepts collide. For example, shortly after *Údarás na Gaeltachta* erected roads signs inscribed with 'An Ghaeltacht' on or around its boundaries in 1999, one informant from Baile Mhic Íre at the eastern end of the *Múscraí Gaeltacht* in west Cork expressed the opinion that they were wrong to mark out his own area for visitors in such a way: 'Tá an t-uafás daoine go bhfuil an Ghaoluinn aca anso, ach tá an Ghaeltacht thiar i gCiarraí.' [Lots of people speak Irish here, but the Gaeltacht is west in Kerry.]

This could be interpreted simply as the informant believing that the official Gaeltacht boundaries were wrong, but a more accurate translation taking into account the notion of the Gaeltacht being a community of speakers might be that, 'west Kerry is where the Irish-speaking population live (i.e. Gaeltacht), although there are a lot of us here among the English-speakers too, and so the road sign is not completely accurate.'

The use of the word Gaeltacht to mean the geographical area where Irish, or indeed Scottish Gaelic, is spoken is difficult to attest before the nineteenth century, and really only comes to the fore at the start of the twentieth century when it was used by the romantic nationalist language revivalists of *Conradh na Gaeilge* [The Gaelic League]. The parallel meaning of Gaeltacht as an ethnolinguistic group, or the culture associated



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with it, is the only one present in earlier literature. It is possible that the term had its genesis in opposition to its antonym, *Galltacht*, which may predate it and was certainly in use by the fourteenth century (Ó Torna 2000). Indigenous ethnic groups the world over often give names to their neighbours before adopting a distinctive name to describe themselves. The ethnic name used historically by the natives of Ireland, Scotland and Mann to describe themselves, *Gael* (plural *Gaeil*), for example, is in origin a loan word adopted from the neighbouring Brittonic Celtic languages, spoken in western Britain and in Brittany, during the early middle ages. The *Gaeil* themselves referred to all foreigners as *Gall* (plural *Gaill*). The description of all those of non-Gaelic origin as *Gaill* continued in native usage right into the modern period, but does not appear to be a primarily linguistic classification. Despite the fact that many of them had become a constituent part of Irish-speaking society for centuries, often actually dominating certain political and cultural aspects of it, the descendants of Viking settlers, Anglo-Normans, English and others who came to Ireland from the tenth century onwards were referred to constantly as *Gaill* both by the native literary classes and by themselves (Ó Mianáin 2001). The word *Galltacht* referred to the non-Gaelic people and to their attributes, although it had a secondary territorial meaning as 'places where the Gaill live'. Some of these Gaill would have been thoroughly Gaelicized, others utterly foreign in language and socio-political organization. In a line from an eighteenth-century poem, for example, the northern poet Séamas Dall Mac Cuarta laments the fact that his friends have abandoned him 'ó d'athraíos uaibh chun na Galltacht' suas' [since I left you to go up to the Galltacht] (Ó Torna 2000: 56). Although in this instance the *Galltacht* is definitely a place, in context it undoubtedly means 'among the Gaill' and has cultural or political

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overtones as the poet is feeling cut off from his old (Gaelic) friends.

The intellectual construction of the Gaeltacht as a symbol and as a perceived bastion of native Irish language, a culture which had elsewhere been soiled by centuries of contact with English, was central to the romantic nationalist ideology of the nineteenth-century Irish-language revivalists. The places where Irish was widely spoken were generally called 'the Irish-speaking districts' by the pre-Gaelic League revivalists (Ó Murchú 2001), but from the time the League was established in 1893 and turned into a mass popular movement, the word Gaeltacht, with variant spellings, was the word used almost exclusively in both the Irish and English languages in revivalist publications such as *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* and *An Claidheamh Soluis* (Ó Torna 2000: 58-9). The change in terminology reflects the change in emphasis and in the geographical position of the language between the time of the early revivalists and the start of the twentieth century. In the mid-nineteenth century Irish was still spoken as a native language in much of the country and so the aims of the activists were both to teach literacy to Irish speakers and to encourage those who had no Irish or whose families had recently abandoned it to take it up again. The notion of the Gaeltacht as solely on the western seaboard and as a place for language learning and cultural holidays in beautiful scenery was less immediate in the nineteenth century as Irish was still to be found in most of the country and revivalists in many inland areas and even on the edge of urban centres would have been able to hear Irish spoken near their homes, even if not by all age groups in all districts. By the turn of the century, with the exception of isolated rural areas and individual elderly people scattered throughout the country, the physical location of the Gaeltacht on the western and southern seaboards and in mountain areas became more obvious.

In practice the state had recognized the existence of the Gaeltacht as a particular cultural and socio-economic zone where Irish was spoken, implicitly since its foundation, and explicitly since the publication in 1926 of the *Statement of Government Policy on the Recommendations of the Commission* (Saorstát Éireann 1926), in response to the report of the Gaeltacht Commission which sat 1925-1926. The Gaeltacht was not in fact defined by statute until the end of 1956, when a new government department for the region, Roinn na Gaeltachta, was established and the Gaeltacht Areas Order, 1956 (Statutory Instrument No. 245 of 1956) was published to set out the geographical areas in which the new ministry was to have jurisdiction.

The definition of two sorts of Gaeltacht set out in the 1926 government policy document area as 'Irish-Speaking Districts' where 80 per cent or upwards of the population was Irish-speaking and 'Partly Irish-speaking Districts' where Irish speakers formed 25 per cent to 79 per cent of the population was adopted by the government as a 'convenient working arrangement' (Saorstát Éireann 1926: 4). These definitions were taken directly from the Report of Coimisiún na Gaeltachta, and are more widely known by the terms used therein, *Fíor-Ghaeltacht* [true Gaeltacht] and *Breac-Ghaeltacht* [dappled, middling or partial Gaeltacht] respectively. Thirty years prior to the creation of the separate ministry, the government had decided the Minister for Fisheries would act as the coordinating authority for Gaeltacht services and the Executive Council would 'continue to deal with the coordination of departmental activities in relation to the growth and spread of the Irish Language generally' (Saorstát Éireann 1926: 30). The Minister for Fisheries took on the portfolio of the Land Commission at the same time as responsibility for the Gaeltacht, and given the socio-economic slant of much of what was

in the Statement of Government Policy, the combination of responsibilities may have seemed logical. However, government intervention in the language question in the Gaeltacht operated in other important areas too, notably education, local government and administration, and improvement of housing and infrastructure. These areas were handled by other government departments. As the definition of the Gaeltacht was not statutory until 1956, despite the efforts for coordination between the various ministries and agencies, a government memorandum prepared for the Taoiseach dated 19 January 1956 (National Archives, Department of the Taoiseach, S15811A) suggests that as many as twelve different understandings of where the Gaeltacht was to be found were in circulation at the time, from the first official definition which is contained in the Local Offices and Appointments (Gaeltacht) Order, 1928 through Acts on housing, school meals, vocational education, to the different operating structures of the Garda Síochána [police force] and the Defence Forces. The main geographical definitions of the Gaeltacht for these different purposes before 1956 have been mapped in Ní Bhrádaigh, McCarron, Walsh and Duffy (2007), and show the considerable variation. Although the 82 recommendations contained in the 1926 Gaeltacht Commission's *Report* are directed primarily at language use in state agencies, including the judiciary, post offices, police and military, none of the suggested policy areas could have been accepted or implemented by the state in the absence of the national discourse on language revival.

It was intended in 1926 that the Fíor-Ghaeltacht areas should be administered through Irish alone and that all education there would also be in Irish only. In the breac-Ghaeltacht, areas physically surrounding the core areas, administration and education was to be developed rapidly towards Irish-medium provision. The rest of the country

was an area targeted for full language revival rather than language preservation and development. The underlying ideology was one of a belief in language revitalization at the national level, with more or less specific plans according to the presence of Irish as a community language at local level. These geographical divisions were not meant to be set in stone, but to change in favour of Irish, with the breac-Ghaeltacht and the rest of the country to become fíor-Ghaeltacht in the course of time.

The Gaeltacht Areas Order (1956) uses the townland as a unit, since that is the traditional rural land division that most of the population recognize, and it lists these as whole or parts of the smallest administrative areas used by the state, the district electoral divisions, as 'determined to be Gaeltacht areas for the purposes of the Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) Act, 1956 (No. 21 of 1956)', being the Act which set up the Department of the Gaeltacht. Although public opinion in Ireland generally assumes that the Gaeltacht was defined as those areas where Irish was the primary community language, this definition is hard to sustain under close examination. Indeed, although the reason for the existence of the Gaeltacht as a statutory area is linguistic, from 1956 it was far from being an exclusively Irish-speaking or even bilingual community. The area it encompassed contains many townlands where Irish was certainly spoken, but as a minority language.

The Gaeltacht area, so defined, was a result of a special language census by the CSO of households that were deemed to be in the Gaeltacht in 1956 by one or more of the dozen or so definitions that had been identified as being in use. This special census, basically a report by the house-to-house enumerators who collected the general census of population forms that year, was then further verified by selected re-examination visits

by three specially selected school inspectors, and further referral to government experts.

The original draft of the Gaeltacht map prepared on 8 September 1956 (available in the National Archives, S15811B), included core areas where Irish speakers were in a clear majority, typically surrounded by larger areas that were recommended to be kept under review 'for potential inclusion'. Hence, the proposed definition of the Gaeltacht prepared internally for the government already recognized that language ideology and management were the driving forces in describing the Gaeltacht rather than the more objective criteria of actual language ability and practice. When the government's Order was made, on 21 September 1956, nearly all the 'potential areas' were included, as were some contiguous townlands that had not previously even been considered for possible inclusion. Figure 12.3 illustrates in detail the mapping of one particular Gaeltacht region. It is the Múscraí region, which is located in western Cork (Area 5 on Figure 12.2). The map shows the townlands (light lines) within each electoral division (bold lines) according to the 1956 draft and actual order. The areas marked as '3' are areas of small population on the edge of electoral divisions which were included, but which are not mentioned in the early draft. Similar maps could be prepared for other regions too. Figure 12.3 also shows the small expansion of this Gaeltacht region in 1982, which essentially extended it to include nearly the whole parish of Cill na Martra.

**INSERT FIGURE 12.3 HERE**

The only exclusions of Irish-speaking areas from the original draft appear to be isolated townlands where Irish was observed to have been spoken as a native language but that were not contiguous to core Gaeltacht areas, a fact which further confirms the

Gaeltacht boundaries to be driven by a policy for area language management, or the intention to develop such plans, rather than being simply linguistic reservations for the management of a residual bilingual population.

The inclusion of these linguistically peripheral areas was not entirely cynical nor illogical. Most of the secondary schools were located in these areas as they tended to be in the villages and small towns that were population centres, but where the English language had made most advances since the mid-nineteenth century. Equally, inclusion of such areas meant that many parishioners were not separated from their churches, and sports fields and other amenities remained within the jurisdiction of the Gaeltacht and so could benefit from subsidy and improvement as amenities for the Irish-speaking population. All this sought to maintain the rural communities to which the Irish-speaking communities belonged and to bring them under one government ministry responsible for their economic and social development, which were still seen as the primary context for linguistic preservation and expansion. The central, though ambiguous, status of Irish as a community language, particularly in the geographical margins of the core Gaeltacht areas was confirmed by the wording used by government when further extending the Gaeltacht boundary to some adjacent areas in 1967, 1974 and 1982 (Statutory Instruments 200/1967, 192/1974 and 350/1982):

Whereas the areas specified in the Schedule to this Order are substantially Irish speaking areas or areas contiguous thereto which, in the opinion of the Government, ought to be included in the Gaeltacht with a view to preserving and extending the use of Irish as a vernacular language.

The emphasis is plainly on the Gaeltacht as a planning area where Irish is to be preserved and *extended*, even to areas which are contiguous to areas where it is spoken by a substantial part of the population.

There is thus a complex relationship to Irish in the official Gaeltacht. Since 1956 it contains regions where Irish is still a major, if not entirely dominant, community language and others where Irish is the first language of only a very small percentage of the local population. Gaeltacht community language policy, taken according to Spolsky (2004) and Shohamy (2006) as being the people's beliefs about and practices with regard to Irish, to English, to bilingualism and language questions generally, and specifically the status and roles of the languages, is a multifaceted combination of the national process of language shift towards English that has taken place, the communities' own conscious or accidental bucking of the trend, and the region's position as the target of specific language policies since the foundation of the Irish state.

The creation of the new department in 1956 was controversial at the time, although supported by most of the non-governmental lobby in favour of Irish such as Conradh na Gaeilge [the Gaelic League] and *Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge* [the National Congress for Irish], even if there were arguments throughout the mid-1950s as to whether it should have its main offices in Dublin or in the west. By defining the Gaeltacht as a much smaller area than that suggested in 1926, and limiting it in most cases to the areas where Irish was still relatively strong, if not dominant, it was the government's intention to use fewer resources more efficiently. On removing responsibility for dealing with a major part of the state's Irish speakers from other offices and departments, one of the results of the policy was to remove any remaining necessity to have civil servants in all



the government ministries who were able to speak Irish well and who would have had a professional interest in serving the Irish-speaking population. Although giving the Gaeltacht and hence language matters a seat at the cabinet table, the concentration of Irish-language affairs in the one ministry has gradually removed the language from much of the rest of the public service.

The new Minister for the Gaeltacht continued to address the region as an economic planning area with action on the language situation itself playing only a peripheral role in its development. The argument used in the 1950s that a separate minister would have brought strength to Gaeltacht interests at inner government level has been undermined as since Roinn na Gaeltachta was established in 1956 it has only sporadically been assigned its own full minister. It has frequently either been merged with other departments or shared a minister in such areas as the Department of the Taoiseach, Education, Lands, Industry and Commerce, Finance, Fisheries and Forestry, Arts, Culture, Heritage, Islands, Community and Rural Affairs. Far from achieving a higher profile for the Gaeltacht through association with bigger portfolios, as might be argued, it has generally been peripheralized and, with some notable exceptions, been run by a junior minister or to all intents and purposes left to the civil service.

The ring-fencing of the Gaeltacht and the resultant management technique is an example of how state ideology had evolved by this time, for although the political parties differed in many nuances on their approach to the question then, and indeed still do, there is consensus on the broad issues. This is probably in fact due to the side-lining of the language question since 1956, when it really became the concern of only the Departments of the Gaeltacht and of Education. Where there is broad consensus, there is

little debate as a non-controversial issue will not come to the fore in national politics. As we have seen, the language question is not a key concern for the majority of the population, who are happy to support the teaching of Irish in schools and want to preserve the Gaeltacht. The Gaeltacht population itself was too small to apply pressure successfully, and in this period had developed into a culture dependent on state largesse.

Defining the Gaeltacht was only the first step in a new policy line that formally closed the ideology of national language revival based on geographical expansion of the Gaeltacht areas. The inter-party government which devised the new Gaeltacht policy was undoubtedly going to address the broader question, but was short lived. It was replaced in 1957 by another Fianna Fáil administration under Éamon de Valera, who retired in favour of Seán Lemass in 1959. The party remained in government until 1973. Although more conservative on Irish-language issues, and still nominally in favour of Irish-language revival, the new government did not set about dismantling Roinn na Gaeltachta to reintegrate Irish policy across government, or about redefining the Gaeltacht regions in a major way to include even weaker areas. Although reluctant to abandon general revival, de Valera had himself already stated that some stocktaking on the issue was necessary.

### **Redefining targets**

The retreat from state-sponsored Irish-language immersion education was marked in this period. Ó Riagáin (1993) believes there to be evidence that the generalized Irish-medium policy was not popular in the 1960s and probably earlier, but this may be attributable to the frustration felt that revival was not being achieved as outlined above.

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By the mid-1960s the immersion and bilingual primary schools, which had already dropped back to less than a quarter of schools, were openly attacked by some prominent academics, such as MacNamara (1966), who believed immersion programmes were damaging from an educational perspective and that children from the Gaeltacht were not mastering English and mathematics at an acceptable level for their needs in the English-speaking world, in Ireland or the countries to which they would emigrate. Although these findings were refuted at the time, and immersion and minority language programmes have been widely praised since, the comments came at a time when the state had already shown itself to have abandoned commitment to language revival through the schools, and parents and school boards had been moving away from it too. There was certainly need for more research on methodology and pedagogical techniques in teaching Irish, but this problem was regarded in the public eye as being inseparable from the question of Irish-medium education for Irish learners and Irish speakers. When the voluntary movement for Irish-medium education, Gaelscoileanna, was set up in 1973 to found new schools and lobby for Irish-medium education there were only a handful of Irish-medium schools left outside the Gaeltacht.

There had always been sporadic opposition in the Oireachtas to compulsory Irish in schools and for some public service posts but in general there had been overwhelming consensus on these ideological issue until the 1950s. In that decade parliamentary questions and debates on the issue became more common and much more widely discussed, from a few questions in the early period to a whole day in the Seanad in 1955 (Seanad Éireann Volume 45, 2 November 1955). Opposition deputies in the Dáil became more strident. In a series of debates in 1958, for example, Noel Browne, who had been

Clann na Poblachta Minister for Health in the first Inter-Party government, articulated the belief that the people no longer supported many aspects of the revival policies. In reply, de Valera pointed out that the people had already agreed to the status of Irish by general plebiscite when approving the Constitution in 1937. The Taoiseach also restated his interpretation of the importance of compulsory Irish in schools as it was the only way to ensure that young people would have access to the language and so be able to make informed choices about using it in their adult life. Thus the state is now being portrayed as a facilitator in language revival rather than trying to impose it. Once again, one can see the roots of the current ideology. Dr. Browne's statements that there was widespread hostility towards the language, that its teaching was seen to have no advantage and that there was much cynicism about the matter may have been exaggerated and due in part to the nature of political cut and thrust, but until then all policy emanated from government. Although elected and so governing on behalf of the people, no consultation with the population on the details of language policy had taken place.

Such a consultation was announced in the Seanad on 30 January 1958 as the government response to the question about what should be done to revive Irish after more than a generation of revival based ideology. It was to be the first example since the 1925 Gaeltacht Commission of how Irish governments have delegated matters of advice on policy and even their implementation to outside agencies. They were thus able to show that they are interested in reform and the development of new ways to address the problem, but were able to distance themselves from the responsibility of the primary research and the necessity to accept the implications of any conclusions reached.

An Coimisiún um Athbheochan na Gaeilge [The Commission on the Restoration of the Irish Language] was established by the government in July 1958, with the following terms of reference:

Having regard to the position at present reached in the endeavour to secure the restoration of the Irish language, to consider and to advise as to the steps that should now be taken by the community and the state to hasten progress towards that end.

(Coimisiún um Athbheochan na Gaeilge 1963: vii)

The word 'restoration' rather than 'revival' of Irish had been used as early as the nineteenth century, but it gained currency at this time. The word used in the Irish-language documents is *athbheochan*, meaning 're-animation' which can be translated by either English word. Whereas 'revival' implies bringing a moribund language back to life, 'restoration' might be interpreted as returning the living but marginalized language to its high status. We also 'restore' paintings and ancient ruins in order to make them attractive in museums and for heritage tourism.

The Commission worked for exactly five years. It was made up of thirty-two members, two of whom were women, who were drawn mainly from academia, the language movement and some political figures from the early revival years including Earnán de Blaghd. It produced two Interim Reports, on television and on the provision of textbooks for Irish-language secondary schools in 1959. These were not published at the time, but are included in the appendices to *An Tuarascáil Deiridh* (1963), which was also published in a summarized English version in the same year. Their report is

organized under thirty-four headings, and contains 288 recommendations dealing with the role of the state and the people, the language in the machinery of the state, the Gaeltacht, education, media and general society including family and the Church. The Commission's document is an expression on behalf of the revivalists as to what structures could be set in place and what attitudes should prevail for the restoration of Irish. It is obvious that it was compiled over the five-year period rather than prepared in 1963, as many of its recommendations in regard to the Gaeltacht in particular had already been implemented or were merely restatements of government practice, with some small degree of difference in detail. It is in fact a summary of the prevailing attitude towards language revival in powerful circles until the mid-1950s, a description of the actual state of affairs, and a long list of recommendations as to how to reinforce and continue with state action on the language.

Although reference is made to standardization and linguistic development, the Commission's *Final Report* (1963) is concerned primarily with the status issues of restoration, and how the language's position in civil society from government and public service through education to media could be enhanced. The government's extensive 181-page reply to the *Final Report*, set before both Houses of the Oireachtas as a White Paper in January 1965 (*Rialtas na hÉireann* 1965), is much more nuanced and tends towards cautious implementation of some aspects of the recommendations on a non-obligatory basis. The government chose to 'recommend' and encourage the Commission's recommendations to third parties rather than to turn them into Orders, while promising to progressively implement most of those recommendations directed at its own machinery and employees but without giving any timescale. It is in this paper

that overt reference to promoting Ireland as a bilingual society rather than aiming at re-Gaelicization first finds official expression.

It is this document which formed the basis for policy until the 1990s, and still underlies many aspects of it. It is concrete evidence of state's disengagement from direct action on language promotion and an adoption of a favourable but passive approach to Irish-language issues.

### **Standardization**

The development of the Official Standard, an *Caighdeán Oifigiúil*, was driven by the needs of statehood and the role ascribed to Irish as the national and first official language by the constitution. Its development conforms closely to the stages of language planning in Haugen's model (1959), based on Norwegian, with which it was contemporary. The modern standard's origins are in the cultural nationalist movement of the nineteenth century, and it represents another fundamental paradox in Irish-language management. The revival movement was built on an ideological commitment to the revitalization and development of *caint na ndaoine*, 'the speech of the people', a dialectally diverse language with an impoverished spread of domains of usage, as a unified national language. The full version of the standard was first published in 1958 (*Rannóg an Aistriúcháin* 1958). It is still the authoritative handbook, although there are frequent debates about its reform, for example Ó Ruairc (1999), Ó Baoill (2000), Williams (2006). The 1958 volume covers mainly grammar and orthography, complementing a document published some eleven years earlier which dealt only with spelling reform (*Rialtas na hÉireann* 1947). By the 1970s the standard spelling and grammar were firmly established as the only authoritative variety in the state administration and education,

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the key domains of Irish-language policy.

The standard Irish handbook is officially anonymous. It is the work of Rannóg an Aistriúcháin, the 'Translation Section', which is a service of the Houses of the Oireachtas, being the Dáil [National Representative Assembly], Seanad [Senate] and Oifig an Uachtaráin [the President's Office]. Séamas Daltún was the main author of the final work, which was compiled under great pressure in about 18 months before its publication, based on the substantial work of Daltún's predecessors, particularly Tomás Page, and the experience of the members of Rannóg an Aistriúcháin over many years. The handbook's origins, and so those of the standard itself, are thus in the need for internal consistency in the provision of Irish versions of government and legislative documentation. The first version of the full standard was published in 1953 with the more tentative title of *Gramadach na Gaeilge – Caighdeán Rannóg an Aistriúcháin* [Irish Grammar – The Translation Section's Standard]. This was seen by Rannóg an Aistriúcháin as the first step in a national consultation about the standard. They write (Rannóg an Aistriúcháin 1958: viii) that the opinions and suggestions that they received as a result of that publication formed the basis for the next draft which was itself then given to unnamed people, whom they knew to be interested in grammar and who had expertise in the field.

The handbook declares further that 'helpful advice was given by native speakers from all the Gaeltacht areas, from teachers, and from other people who had particular knowledge of the language, and it was agreed with the Department of Education that this booklet should be published as a standard for official usage and as a guide for teachers and the general public' (translation from Rannóg an Aistriúcháin 1958: viii).



The standard was thus developed by a small group of language professionals who sought advice from unnamed experts and acquaintances for the specific purposes of government administration. Having developed this useful tool for internal use, it was crucially then adopted by the Department of Education, and so guaranteed its central position through schooling.

The standard is constructed on four basic principles, translated here from Rannóg an Aistriúcháin (1958: viii):

- 1 As far as possible not to accept any form that does not have good authority in the living language of the Gaeltacht;
- 2 Choose the forms which are most widely used in the Gaeltacht;
- 3 Give appropriate importance to the history and literature of the Irish language;
- 4 Seek regularity and simplicity.

Although these guidelines show that Gaeltacht Irish varieties played a key role in the founding ideology of the standard, and the authors themselves say that all its forms and rules comply with the usage of good Irish speakers in 'some part' of the Gaeltacht, each of the decisions on the standard form can be contested. For example, no definitions are given of 'good authority'. Even though employing the most widely used form of a word or grammatical structure may seem democratic, it is not stated whether this means a word which is understood most widely throughout the country, or that which is used by the largest number of Gaeltacht Irish speakers. The latter might leave the authority consistently with the dialect(s) of Conamara, which although only one part of the Gaeltacht, contains about half of all of the Gaeltacht's Irish speakers.

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While setting out its preferred forms, the standard professes not to impose itself as the only acceptable form of the language:

Tugann an caighdeán seo aitheantas ar leith d'fhoirmeacha agus do rialacha áirithe ach ní chuireann sé ceartfhoirmeacha eile ó bhail ná teir ná toirmeasc ar a n-úsáid. [This standard gives recognition to particular forms and rules but it does not remove the validity of other correct forms, nor does it forbid their usage.]

Rannóg an Aistriúcháin (1956: viii)

However much the authors may have wished to reconcile the existence of the standard with the continued vitality of the regional dialects, the two have not co-existed in total harmony. The dialects, being the native forms of Irish, have continued to lose their vitality as part of a well-documented language shift that continues in the Gaeltacht, while they benefit from negligible recognition from the education system and state agencies. The decline of the dialects is not simply a coincidence but in part the consequence of the promotion of the standard as a prestige form. It has its roots in the national language ideology.

Niall Ó Dónaill, a native of the Donegal Gaeltacht in the north-west of the province of Ulster, was an intellectual and creative writer, but also a state-employed translator and lexicographer. He was the chief editor of the Irish-English Dictionary, *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla*, first published in 1977 and still the standard reference. He was an active member of the milieu that was working to produce the standard in the 1950s, and was one of its champions. In his provocative and highly influential essay on the development of Irish, *Forbairt na Gaeilge* (Ó Dónaill 1951), he clearly articulates his belief that although Irish

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must be careful to cultivate its native roots, it should be cut and pruned to make it develop in more useful ways:

Is cosúil teanga le habhaill. Is é an bás di scaradh lena fréamhacha, ach is troimide a toradh na géaga a bhearradh aici. [A language is like an apple tree. Break its roots and it dies, but its fruits are heavier for cutting its branches.]

Ó Dónaill (1951: 12)

Ó Dónaill makes the point forcefully in this work that the future of Irish is in the cities and on the national stage, and that the promotion of the dialects through an over-indulgence of *caint na ndaoine* [the speech of the people] is a danger to its progress:

Is é bun agus barr mo scéil go gcaithfear foréigean a dhéanamh ar chanúnachas leis an teanga Ghaeilge a shlánú. [The basis of my message is that we must assault dialectal traits/fondness for dialects if the Irish language is to be saved.]

Ó Dónaill (1951: 56)

Nevertheless, Niall Ó Dónaill himself observed the power that the standard quickly acquired some thirty years later when editing a modern edition of a book by an author from his own area that was written in the early twentieth century. Writing in the literary and current affairs magazine *Comhar*, he commented on some local dialect forms which clearly were correct and held authority locally, but which were now frowned upon by editors as being illegitimate or displaced by the standard:

Ní 'ceartfhoirmeacha eile' a bhí iontu, ag cuid mhaith de lucht eagair na Gaeilge, ach foirmeacha réamhchaighdeánacha ar fáisceadh an muinéal go reachtúil acu

sna caogaidí i dTeach Laighean. [Many Irish-language editors decided they were not 'other correct forms', but pre-standard forms whose necks had been legislatively wrung in the 1950s in Leinster House – *seat of the Dáil and Seanad*]

Ó Dónaill (1981: 21-2)

It is clear that although the authors of the standard explicitly stated that they did not intend to undermine any dialectal form which had a historical basis and was part of the living language of the Gaeltacht, after having been adopted by the education system and by all the state agencies, the standard took on its own dynamic to become the only acceptable form in most domains of written Irish usage. The fact that the standard is primarily a written variety has also led to a diglossic situation for the varieties of Irish in the Gaeltacht, where spoken Irish takes as its basis the regional dialect, while all forms of written language tend towards the standard, as this is what is to be found in textbooks and in most published material. Although the standard is flexible to the extent that local dialect words and idioms can be used in a standardized text, there is an observable dualism in its application, the point which Ó Dónaill (1981) highlights. Although many forms are 'acceptable', clearly standard usage has determined the 'preferred' forms, for schools and official documentation. The association of the standard with written Irish and the popular perception of its prescriptive nature are especially cause for concern in populations where the local variety has been weakened through language shift and dialect attrition. As the standard variety of Irish has not developed as a spoken variety outside school-learner circles, it challenges regional dialects but does not offer a complete alternative model, in effect imposing a form of silence on native dialect speakers.

Written standards unavoidably reduce variation and create new hierarchies of linguistic prestige. The standard is an essential tool for the continued development of Irish as a national language. It has served the national language community well, and as a result, modern Irish is now a highly developed and subtle medium which is regularly employed to discuss all contemporary issues from politics, intellectual and academic questions through legislature and governance to all facets of daily life. However, in the Gaeltacht Irish is endangered as a community language and the power of the standard as a prestige written variety itself contributes to the multifaceted process of linguistic endangerment because of the ambiguity of a target language for Gaeltacht speakers faced with a shift or revitalization scenario (Ó hIfearnáin 2008). Language management has been shown to consist of sustaining or changing language practices and ideologies of the speaker community to achieve certain linguistic goals (Spolsky 2004). In the case of Irish, the evidence would suggest that creators of national language policies should seek a compromise that would reinforce intergenerational transmission of the local variety through schooling so as to avoid conflict in the target variety and to encourage community language development. This would, however, require a change in the driving language ideology of the national collective to accommodate the uncodified yet deeply rooted language ideology of the Gaeltacht in a productive way that would not undermine the national development of Irish that the national standard has manifestly facilitated.

### **Developing Irish broadcast media**

That broadcasting was seen as an essential element in language revival and state building in the first period is clear from the fact that the first government White Paper

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on Broadcasting was published at the end of 1923, as soon as the civil war had died down and nearly two years before the establishment of a body as fundamental as the first Coimisiún na Gaeltachta in 1925. The decision to set up a national broadcasting company, under the direction of the Postmaster-General, then responsible for Posts and Telegraphs, was taken in March 1924. The Postmaster-General, J. J. Walsh, clearly believed that as an independent state Ireland should have a national broadcasting station as a tool to develop the country as 'an independent, self-thinking, self-supporting nation in every respect' (Gorham 1967: 12), although he did say in response to the three-month debate as to whether or not a private company should run it that any kind of Irish station would be better than no Irish station at all. Given the thrust of Irish revival policy at the time and the principle that to keep people thinking about Irish it must be heard regularly and talked about, the effect on a population of listening only to the BBC was unpalatable. Clearly the Irish state was keen to use radio as a way to show Ireland's difference from Britain and establish the parameters of cultural policy at the heart of the revived nation, yet while 2RN, Radio Éireann's first channel, came on air in Dublin in 1926, it was another seven years before it became a truly national radio station (Pine 2001). When the Athlone transmitter came on line in June 1932 and the radio went national, it was to broadcast the Eucharistic Congress, a spectacular event when the Irish Catholic Church hosted an international gathering of thousands of clergy and laity. As Gorham (1967) has shown, broadcasting in 1930s and 1940s reflected very much the national myth. Ethnic distinctiveness was broadcast in a diet of Irish music and songs, Catholic religious programming, Gaelic Athletics Association matches, Irish politics, Irish-language programmes and programmes for Irish learners. This was not unusual

for the time and comparable to the content of other European national broadcasters.

There is nothing to say that the population did not enjoy these programmes. Although Irish-language programming was central to the ethos of the new station, it suffered at a number of levels. It seems to have been under-funded in relation to English-language productions (Watson 1997: 214), and was thinner on material and audience feed back. This is, of course, understandable given the professional and marginal economic status of Irish speakers in this early period.

Watson believes that there was for a while a possibility that an Irish-medium channel could have been established in this period, but it came to nothing:

In 1935 T. J. Kiernan was appointed Director of the radio station. He encouraged the formation of a committee in each county to which he would offer broadcasting access. The first committee formed was in Galway, where they hoped access would result in the establishment of some kind of Irish language station. When this was not forthcoming the committee lapsed.

(Watson 1997: 228)

The idea that Radio Éireann, the national broadcasting service, should set up a television station had been mooted as far back as 1926. As soon as the state had decided to set up a television station the question of Irish-language television was put on the table, where it stayed throughout the period, thanks to the efforts of tireless pressure groups such as Gael-Linn (discussed below) under the leadership of Dónall Ó Móráin and the work of the Joint Committee of Gaelic Bodies.

By the time that the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs announced in 1959 that

television and radio would be operated by one company under a semi-state board, it had already been decided that this television would seek revenue not simply through a licence fee and state subsidy but also through commercial sponsorship and advertising. In the economic climate of the time there may have been little choice. The fact that this broadcasting authority was to be a semi-state board is important as this marks the beginning of a rift between direct state control and the broadcasting company. Once the RTÉ [Radio Relfis Éireann] Board (the name given to this semi-state body) had been established, as long as they functioned within the parameters of the establishing Act the government could no longer interfere with regard to Irish-language programming or in any other broadcasting area. The Act itself, in the image of the times, simply says that Irish should be used, but without any defining parameters with regard to programming. Under the margin note 'General duty with respect to national aims', the Broadcasting Authority Act (1960), Article 17 states:

In performing its functions, the Authority shall bear constantly in mind the national aims of restoring the Irish language and preserving and developing the national culture, and shall endeavour to promote the attainment of these aims.

(Acts of the Oireachtas 1960: Vol. 3)

In the years before the creation of the RTÉ Board there had been a chance that a language organization could have been contracted to make Irish-language programmes for the new television service, if not in fact to be central to the establishment of the service itself. An organization founded in 1953 to promote and develop Irish through teaching, publishing and making records of song and music, and which had



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considerable experience in making news-reels and short films, Gael-Linn, made a detailed submission on the case for Irish-language broadcasting in 1958. The Posts and Telegraphs committee examining such submissions rejected their proposal on two grounds. Firstly they thought the financial aspects to be naïve. Secondly, they feared that Gael-Linn would use the television station exclusively in pursuit of their own political aims in favour of language revival whereas the committee assumed that the Irish public wanted light entertainment. Nevertheless, Gael-Linn re-submitted their proposal with a renewed financial plan in 1959. The submission was taken seriously and considered at cabinet level before being rejected on the grounds, given by Leon Ó Broin, Secretary for Posts and Telegraphs, that Gael-Linn did not have the expertise. Dónall Ó Móráin, founding chairman and chief executive of Gael-Linn, argued that in fact politicians were afraid of granting a television franchise to Gael-Linn or any other non-state Irish-language organization because of their concern over the possible political opposition such a body might offer. In an interview with Savage (1996), Ó Móráin maintained that there were 'fears that awarding the franchise to Gael-Linn would have given us a special position in the community which could provide a political threat sooner or later. Many politicians cannot see that for some of us there are more things in heaven and earth than seats in parliament' (Savage 1996: 198).

The Commission on the Restoration of the Irish Language had also identified the importance of television for the language, and issued an eight-page *Interim Report on Television* on 20 March 1959 to coincide with the ministerial decision to set up a new broadcasting authority that would oversee the creation of an Irish television station. The Commission advocated that the new channel should be used to redress what it believed

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was the state's reluctance to fully embrace the language revival, to create a dynamic service that would revitalize the national language. The *Interim Report* stopped short of asking that the new service be an Irish-medium one, preferring to request a "progressive extension of the use of Irish in television programmes" in its *Final Report* (Coimisiún um Athbheochan na Gaeilge 1963: 135). It concluded that if the state failed to act in the interests of the restoration of Irish in setting up the new channel, the effort to save the language is would be doomed to failure.

Although from the beginning RTÉ Television has always produced quality Irish-language and bilingual programmes, it is the semi-commercial nature of the organization which has always been a challenge to devoting major resources to Irish and to making such programming available to peak-time audiences. For although RTÉ was the only television channel based in the Republic and so had no competition in the greater part of the country well into the 1980s, the majority of the potential audience was and is in Dublin and along the east coast, where viewers could receive the growing number of British channels, including the new commercial ones, from across the Irish Sea or from transmitters in the eastern part of Northern Ireland. Competition was thus for both revenue and audience share, the two being intimately linked. Inevitably this led to a marginalization of Irish-language programming. General financial constraints meant that Irish-made programmes were also in the minority.

In March 1969 a group in the Galway Gaeltacht formed Gluaiseacht Chearta Sibhialta na Gaeltachta [The Gaeltacht Civil Rights Movement]. Historian Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh described them:

A group of articulate young radicals suddenly found its voice and began

demanding policies to arrest the dissolution and disappearance of its own community. These Gaeltacht radicals were generally well-educated, and like similar groups in Northern Ireland, were part of the global dynamics of youth politics and civil rights movements of the late 1960s.

(Ó Tuathaigh 1979: 113)

They had many aims to improve their communities and the position of Irish, but it was the eighth item in their constitution which became the most important battle and forced the government, through the RTÉ Board into action to create in the Gaeltacht a radio station for all the Irish speakers in the country (Ó Glaisne 1982: 10).

These activists had recognized Irish-speakers as a minority and the Irish language as a minority issue. As citizens of the state they also believed that proper media presence was their right. This was indeed a radical departure for the time, and substantially different from the traditional state discourse on the nature of Irish speakers in society. Gluaiseacht Chearta Sibhialta na Gaeltachta proceeded to set up a pirate radio station, Saor-Raidió Chonamara [Free Radio Conamara], which broadcast from 28 March until 5 April 1970. Although the authorities quickly closed it down, the pressure from the Gaeltacht population and the proof that even a group of amateurs could set it up and run it made the case against an Irish-medium station untenable. There is no doubt that it was in response to this initiative that Raidió na Gaeltachta was established in 1971, by the RTÉ authority on the recommendation of the government. As Raidió na Gaeltachta was set up as a division of RTÉ, no legislation was required. Raidió na Gaeltachta went on air in April 1972, and gradually expanded to a national service with its headquarters in Conamara and two regional studios in the north-west and the south-west. Smaller

studios have been and are being developed in some of the smaller Gaeltacht areas, and Raidió na Gaeltachta has access to RTÉ studios around the country. English was not permitted on the radio in speech, although English song-lyrics have been allowed in recent years. Unlike the main English-language RTÉ radio stations, RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta does not carry commercial advertising. This can be seen as a foil against the easy dominance of mass-audience English programming as outlined above, as well as a principled stand on the language issue. Banning English, not other languages, as Ó Drisceoil (1996) has discussed, is also an example of how Raidió na Gaeltachta can present a heady and often confusing mix of linguistic radicalism and comfortable conservatism. Raidió na Gaeltachta has a very loyal adult audience throughout the Gaeltacht and has achieved considerable audiences nationally; that it claims that market research has shown these to be in growth. In the 1993 National Survey on Languages, 4 per cent of the population said that they listened to Raidió na Gaeltachta daily or a few times a week, while a further 11 per cent tuned in less often. This is remarkable for a minority language radio station which is often accused of being a local station broadcast nationally. Since May 2001 the station has been available on the internet, and listeners throughout the world can now listen to live-streaming or podcasts.

The setting up by the state of a radio station for the Gaeltacht was the result of political acumen and direct action by a small group of determined individuals. This action at the end of the 1960s and early 1970s brings us into the third phase of language ideology and action.

### **3 1973–92: Consultation and reacting to pressure from the roots**

In the early 1970s Ireland officially changed to a decimal currency system, and in 1973

joined the European Economic Communities, later to become the European Union, as part of its first expansion from six to nine member states. There have been substantial changes in Irish socio-economic life since those momentous years. Ireland has joined the wealthier economies of the world. There have been consequent changes in popular attitudes to the Irish language and hence in the government's essentially reactive policy decisions. The influence of European legislation and thinking on Ireland has been all-pervasive, and generally received in a positive way by government and citizens.

As a small peripheral European economy, Ireland is also a particularly open one, easily influenced by international trends in employment practices and by upturns and downturns in the global economy. As in other parts of Europe there has been a decline in the public sector, meaning that the state's potential linguistic influence on a large percentage of the workforce has also declined. In some respects Ireland was ahead of the posse with respect to privatization, having few directly controlled state companies but many autonomous semi-state bodies which were then, and continue to be, owned or principally owned by the state yet operate in the private sector. The 1970s also saw an expansion of higher education, including the foundation of universities in Limerick and north Dublin, and institutes of technology and regional technical colleges around the country. Participation rates grew rapidly in secondary and tertiary education, areas where the state has always influenced rather than dictated language policies.

In 1970 the Committee on Irish Language Attitudes Research (CILAR) was set up. It produced its report in 1975. Unlike the Commission on the Restoration of the Irish Language, a group of experts and concerned individuals which reported twelve years earlier on ways in which they thought the language could still be revived, CILAR was a

government sponsored research exercise to gather data on attitudes towards Irish in the general population, and to assess to what extent the public supported the state's Irish-language policies. By 1975 the only remaining explicit policy that affected the whole population was the compulsory study of Irish at school, although a general ethos in favour of a role for Irish in society remained, including its official status and public symbolic usage, as well as subsidies to Irish-language publications and programming and economic support for the Gaeltacht because of the numbers of Irish speakers who lived there.

In 1975, as CILAR submitted its report, the government further delegated language policy issues by setting up Bord na Gaeilge, which was given statutory status three years later. This semi-autonomous state agency was to promote the Irish language, have the general functions of developing, co-ordinating, reviewing and assisting measures and procedures relating to Irish, and advise the government and statutory bodies on matters relating to the language (Bord na Gaeilge Act, no. 14 of 1979).

The movement towards surveying popular opinion on the language issue since the 1970s while simultaneously setting up semi-state bodies outside government to deal with policy direction is evidence not just of disengagement from revival policies, but is also in agreement with a general European trend away from compulsion in language policies to one loosely based on reaction to the perceived needs of a minority. This could be interpreted as a process of democratization in that it is the state's perception of popular attitudes and minority rights which now drives the language policy in Ireland, such that it exists. Indeed, it is tempting to describe west European policies towards autochthonous minority languages as generally being of 'benign neglect', a term which

has been used in relation to many state policies across the developed world since the 1970s. This is not, however, the appropriate way to describe Irish policy in the 1970s and 1980s. There is, of course, a certain inconsistency inherent in the term 'benign neglect' in the Irish case which may not be true for the practice of continental European states. In the 1970s continental states such as France, Spain and Italy began to evolve away from oppression of indigenous ethnolinguistic groups towards tolerance and even support for the actions of language activists from those communities, but since the 1920s Ireland had taken most action in favour of Irish out of the hands of the campaigners and enthusiasts and embedded it in the actions of the state. Having assumed near total responsibility for all aspects of both status and corpus language planning, the state had almost silenced the language movement born in the late nineteenth century by integrating its aims into government policy, and then funding all initiatives through the national purse. This action removed the ability of language activists to exert pressure on the authorities in coherent ways while simultaneously creating a culture of dependence in the Gaeltacht regions. Having created such a structure, distancing itself from good husbandry of policy can only really be described as negligence. The policies pursued from the 1970s through the early 1990s can only be described as benign in that the state did not articulate a conscious opposition to the protection and promotion of Irish and continued to respond favourably to calls to action from those sections of the community that were able to get its attention. Essentially this means that the state reacted supportively to the minority who actively set up Irish-language schools and sought services and media in Irish rather than actually leading the way itself, as it would have done in the 1930s. For example, it responded to pressure from a challenge in 1969–70 by the Conamara-based

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Gaeltacht Civil Rights Movement by setting up Raidió na Gaeltachta as an RTÉ service in 1970, which started broadcasting in 1972. On the other hand, it was pressure from within the civil service itself which led the state to remove the obligation for new employees to pass an Irish examination in their probation test (Department of Education, Circular 9/74), a point of view which is expressed by civil servant representatives in letters in several internal government memoranda held in the National Archives dating from the introduction of the rules in the 1920s. It may still be easier to see this as an expression of government desire at the time to remove the compulsory study of Irish as it dropped the necessity to pass Irish in order to be awarded the school Intermediate and Leaving Certificate in 1973. In the same year in negotiating accession to the European Communities Ireland asked that Irish be designated an official language of the body, but that this would only entail the translations of the founding and accession Treaties. This less than full official status is reported to have astonished other member states (Ó Laighin 2008: 258) who opposed it, but who eventually yielded to Ireland's insistence. The ambiguous official status of Irish as an official language for treaty purposes only, but not as an official or working language for all other purposes, continued until it became a full official language of the European Union on 1 January 2007 when it became one of 23 official languages. Had it been official in 1973, it would have been one of only seven. The action was brought about by an organized campaign, energized by changes in the state's language management policies within Ireland in that period, including the Official Languages Act (2003). It was in 2004 that the government announced that it would seek official status for Irish in the European Union, in the context of a major expansion of EU membership



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and consequently of official languages, including in particular Maltese, which has a relatively small number of speakers within a bilingual environment.

The state received little challenge from the public at large to its general stance at the time. The National Survey on Languages in 1993, the national survey conducted by Institiúd Teangeolaíochta Éireann in 1983, and the Committee on Irish Language Attitudes Research survey in 1973 (Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin 1994) all showed that citizens wanted Irish revival to happen but not necessarily to participate in that revival on a personal basis. If the 1970s saw a withdrawal of the state from initiatives in Irish-language promotion and revival, it is in the same period that self-motivated groups within the population, both inside and outside the Gaeltacht, emerged. The state maintained ultimate power through its ability to support or withhold finance for projects that came to it looking for funds, but because of the continuing grounded ideology in favour of the promotion of Irish these activists were able to push the state into supporting Gaeltacht radio and a new Irish-medium schools movement as well as the foundation of a number of new publishing companies and written media during the 1970s and 1980s. Governments were not quick to react and normally required proof of popular support for the initiatives in question, albeit in a passive way from the broadly English-speaking population. For example, around 70 per cent of the population in all three national surveys on languages from the 1970s to the early 1990s thought that the government should provide all-Irish schools wherever the public wanted them, but only one-third or less would have sent their own children to them if they were available (Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin 1994: 26-7). The state does not found Irish-medium schools, but comes to the support of parent and teacher groups who do so. As the proportion of

children attending Irish-medium schools has not reached one-third this survey information highlights the passive, even consumerist nature of support for the sector in the general population. The Irish-medium schools movement is the best illustration of the democratization of Irish-language issues outside the Gaeltacht. The schools, which have grown rapidly in number since the early 1970s, enjoy cross-party political support and are to be found in nearly every county. Some of the founders of the schools were always sceptical about the depth of this encouragement and saw it as cynical, allowing the state a paternalistic role for which it got credit, but which absolved it of the need for a policy of its own.

The revival of Irish-medium schooling started in 1973 with the founding of the *Gaelscoileanna* organization, then known as Coiste Náisiúnta na Scoileanna LánGhaeilge [The National Committee of Irish-medium Schools]. It brought together the people who had set-up their own schools to campaign for state funding and recognition by the Department of Education. Since Bord na Gaeilge came into being in 1978 it has received an annual grant towards funding its activities, which include working as an intermediary between the Department and the schools, discussing planning and recognition criteria, advising schools on educational and social matters, and coordinating joint activities between schools. Although it stands out for its zeal in establishing new schools, it has gradually grown to include most of the *modhscoileanna* [Model Schools] and *A-scoileanna*, those primary and secondary schools which were founded as Irish-medium schools by the state during the 1920s and 1930s, or which converted to that status, and a number of Gaeltacht schools which have welcomed its expertise. It currently has a membership of 168 primary and forty-three post-primary

schools outside the Gaeltacht, of which thirty-two primary and four secondary are in Northern Ireland. The schools are spread throughout the country, but with a particular concentration in large urban areas. This is not surprising as the schools are rarely the only one in a neighbourhood and so a critical mass of population is always needed in order to make the Irish-medium choice viable. Steadily building in number through the 1970s and early 1980s, the number of new schools surged forward in the late 1980s and during the 1990s, before slowing down again in recent years. Although some of the schools are small and rural or in small towns, it is naturally easier to set up in an area with a concentrated population. Geographically, the membership of Gaelscoileanna is densest in the south-western province of Munster, in Co. Dublin, in Northern Ireland and in Co. Galway. The schools are set up by parents who seek a particular style of education for their children, the central theme of which is the Irish language. In urban areas the schools tend to be grouped at opposite ends of the socio-economic scale, either in wealthy suburban settings or in areas with above average unemployment and low incomes. It is the parental commitment which is their driving force rather than any aspect of state language policy. Indeed, in Northern Ireland and in the marginalized urban settings of the South, although the schools sought integration into the mainstream and its accreditation and funding, it was their opposition to state practice that was one of the strongest motivations.

Not all of the Irish-medium schools are recognized by the Department of Education and Science. In 2008 there were officially 139 Gaeltacht schools and 130 Irish-medium primary schools outside the Gaeltacht. The Department also recognizes forty-one Irish-medium secondary schools nationally as well as twenty more that teach at least one

subject through Irish. The Gaeltacht schools, many of which are small national schools, are all officially Irish-medium, but in fact this is not always the case as some of them, especially post-primary schools in the small towns within the official Gaeltacht, are English-dominant. The main difference between Gaeltacht schools of all types and the Irish-medium schools in the rest of the country is the background of the pupils. In reply to a questionnaire sent in March 2002, Gaelscoileanna in the south-western region estimated that at most 5 per cent to 10 per cent of the pupils spoke Irish as their home language, and some schools had no home-Irish speakers at all, whereas virtually all Gaeltacht schools have a significant number of pupils who have a completely or partially Irish-speaking domestic background.

The number of children who come from completely Irish-speaking homes has diminished in most of the Gaeltacht, and in some of the weaker Irish-speaking areas was never as many as half the pupils. In addition, the Gaeltacht has experienced several types of migration which affect its school-age population. Historically, the economy has led to migration of the youth who when returning, if they were able to do so, may have brought with them partners who did not speak Irish well and young children who may have spent some of their early years in exclusively English-speaking environments, elsewhere in Ireland, or very commonly in the United Kingdom or North America. In some schools in the 1970s and 1980s when job opportunities became available in the Gaeltacht, very large numbers returned home. This was especially the case in Donegal, Mayo and Galway, even if migration to and from these areas had always been a social reality. In 1987 in one school in Acaill, in Co. Mayo, over half the top class were born in England (Hindley 1990: 86), although undoubtedly also natives of the area. The problem

is not so important in every region, but in reply to a questionnaire in 2002, most schools in the Gaeltacht areas in the southwest said that returned migrants make up between 10 and 25 per cent of pupils in each class. Several of the Kerry schools pointed out that with the closure of some small schools and the emerging patterns of commuting to work in the urban centres, they now include places outside the official Gaeltacht in their catchment areas. On top of these issues, the Gaeltacht now has a substantial immigrant population who come mostly from European countries, including Britain, France, Spain, the Netherlands and Germany. Some schools say that although they are not in every class, as many as 10 per cent of children may come from these backgrounds. In view of these varied linguistic problems, and the fact that many teachers felt that Gaeltacht schools were significantly different from the immersion style and needs of Gaelscoileanna, they formed their own organization, Eagraíocht na Scoileanna Gaeltachta [the Gaeltacht Schools Organization].

Although this third phase in Irish-language policy displayed considerable initiative on the part of Irish speakers in the Gaeltacht and organization of the revival movement around the Irish-medium schools, it also illustrates how particular groups have been able to use the system in their favour rather than openly challenge the dominant ideological and power structures within the state. Irish-medium schooling, the successful campaign for Raidió na Gaeltachta, the thriving Gaeltacht cooperative movement and Gaeltacht-based publishing companies established during this period are all testaments to the vigour of Irish-speaking society, but ultimately all sought state approval and government funding. Power resides ultimately in the government and in the machinery of the state, not with the Irish-speaking population who are too small in

number to have a significant impact and economic weight. Habitual Irish-speaking citizens are a tiny minority, many of them living in the Gaeltacht with its state-sponsored industries or working in professions in the public or semi-state sector. Nearly all Irish speakers are also skilled bilinguals, quite capable of living in wider society and dealing with the state and all its agencies in English. From the start of the 1970s when governments started to try to identify what the people wanted to do about Irish by surveying opinion and setting up semi-autonomous bodies to suggest ways to promote the language, through the piecemeal and then systematic recognition of new Irish-medium schools in the 1980s, the state took a back seat and took no initiatives that were not prompted by direct action or cajoling from interest groups. By the early 1990s a new understanding of how to manage the language question had thus become ensconced that allowed the state apparatus to continue with the basic tenets of language revival ideology, but at the same time delegate responsibility for this to bodies such as Bord na Gaeilge, which since 2001 along with the state's Irish-language publishing company An Gúm and An Coiste Téarmaíochta [The Terminology Development Committee] is part of an all-Ireland body called Foras na Gaeilge.

As a result of sitting back and letting the situation incubate in this way for twenty years, the state hatched a new understanding that Irish speakers are a cultural and linguistic minority, while the majority must still be able to learn the language as it is part of their heritage which carries sentimental and ceremonial value. Governments have come to manage Irish now as a dual issue. The Irish-speaking population, by upbringing or by conscious choice, is composed of people from the Gaeltacht and elsewhere who form a cultural minority. The bulk of the population might still aspire to become Irish

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speakers, but their relationship with the language is one of cultural heritage, seeing Irish as an ethnic marker. The state is thus no longer actively engaged in attempts at reversing language shift, but overtly aims to support those who try to do so. To an extent this detaches the Irish language from the nationalist, structuralist discourse of the earliest policy phases. The removal of Irish from the centre stage of political rhetoric to the more peripheral and non-essential sphere of cultural leisure and consumer heritage also facilitated cross-border cooperation in language matters. Little by little governments have dismantled the remaining areas of compulsion in the state sector which deals with the whole population while simultaneously creating new services and agencies to deal with the Irish-speaking minority.

#### **4 1992 to the present: linguistic minority rights and cultural heritage**

Much of the requirement for compulsory Irish in the state sector has now been set aside. Irish is no longer required for applicants to the civil service. School pupils no longer need to sit the Irish examination for the Leaving Certificate, and a certificate in proficiency in Irish is no longer required from newly qualified secondary school teachers except if they intend to work in the Gaeltacht or in an Irish-medium school. When state-owned companies have been privatized, as the telecommunications and mobile phone companies Eircom and Eircell were in 2000, the necessary legislation contained no obligation to continue to provide services in Irish. Other state-owned utilities may well follow.

While one aspect of current state language policy is the relaxing of its self-imposed obligations and compulsory study in a variety of fields, it has nevertheless now become active in defining its own role in the promotion of Irish by embracing non-governmental

groups and protecting the position of Irish by promoting the rights of its speakers. The new policy ethos is especially evident in Irish-medium education, the establishing of dedicated services for Irish speakers such as a television station, and in legislating to provide services for Irish speakers from state agencies, companies and other bodies.

The Education Act (1998) set up a new statutory body with responsibility for most aspects of Irish-medium education. An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta [Council for Gaeltacht and Gaelscoil Education] has both an advisory and a support role in the planning and coordination of textbooks and learning aids and the development of policies to facilitate education through Irish in primary and post-primary schools. Bringing together the Department of Education and Science, Gaelscoileanna and Eagraíocht na Scoileanna Gaeltachta, it was formed in December 2001 and first met in March 2002. The removal of some of the educational and financial uncertainty from the many other burdens of the Irish-language educational support sector and the promise of investment in materials and training is undoubtedly advantageous to them. While guaranteeing a special position for Irish-medium education by institutionalizing and giving authority to what were previously pressure groups the state has, however, also effectively taken back power over the sector and compartmentalized the issue by removing this aspect of schooling from the mainstream of the Department's work. Any such body requires compromise from the language movement on the one hand and the tools of the state on the other.

An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta has commissioned important studies on issues in Irish-medium schooling, and the effectiveness of the offering. One of the most important was a wide-ranging study of the present state of



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Irish Gaeltacht schools (Mac Donncha et al. 2005), which highlights the very different experience of Gaeltacht schools which serve communities of mixed language abilities and the non-Gaeltacht Gaelscoil sector. The report divided Gaeltacht schools into three categories according to the percentage of Irish speakers in their area: Category A where this was over 70 per cent, B with 40 to 69 per cent and C where there were less than 39 per cent Irish speakers. It identified the fact that the majority of Gaeltacht schools are small and consequently find it hard to accommodate the wide spectrum of linguistic abilities among the pupils. It also identified the problem that Gaeltacht schools, like Gaeltacht policy institutions generally, are being supported within a system that was designed to sustain the English-medium sector, and is ill-adapted for Gaeltacht needs. The report analysed the medium of instruction in the schools and found that in the A category schools (thirty-nine of the 129 Gaeltacht primary schools) the majority of teaching was in Irish, as was the case in the twenty-one B category schools. In the C category schools, however, English is the only medium in about half of classes. Of the twenty-seven post-primary schools in the Gaeltacht nine were A category, seven were B and eleven were C. Despite the fact that pupils' fluency in Irish in the sector was quite high, ranging from 95 per cent in A schools through 71 per cent in the B schools to 54 per cent in the C schools, Irish-medium teaching in post-primary schools was shown to be in crisis. Several schools were teaching in English only, and even schools in Category A areas were teaching 10 per cent or more through English.. The report concludes with recommendations on educational support services, resources, definitions of Gaeltacht schools and their future sizes and the integration of schooling with other aspects of language management or planning. Above all it points out that the findings represent an

established pattern that needs the most urgent attention.

### **Irish-language broadcasting in the neo-liberal era**

In his study of the establishment of the Irish-language television channel, Watson (2003: 127) says that broadcasting in Irish has to navigate between opposing ideologies that promote their own nexus of ideas and behaviour. Modern neo-liberalism expects commercial viability, while the traditional ideology which drove the creation of the channel supports the promotion and restoration of Irish. The 1990s saw the expansion of private commercial television and of local and community radio. The Radio and Television Act of 1988 which governs the terms for applications for a licence to the Independent Radio and Television Commission (IRTC) does little more to emphasize the obligation to provide Irish-language programming than earlier Broadcasting Acts:

(2) In the consideration of applications received by it and in determining the most suitable applicant to be awarded a sound broadcasting contract, the Commission shall have regard to –

...

(d) The quantity, quality, range and type of programmes in the Irish language and the extent of programmes relating to Irish culture proposed to be provided.

(Radio and Television Act, 1988: Part III, Section 2 (d))

Under Part IV, Section 18(1) of the same act these conditions also apply to television broadcasting licences, while Part IV, Section 18(3)(a) reinforces this, stating that any new television service must 'have special regard for the elements which distinguish that

[Irish] culture and in particular the Irish language'. So, although the legislation governing the attribution of licences requires the private television and radio stations to contribute to Irish culture, there is no stipulation that there must be Irish-language programming. All the Act requires potential broadcasters to do is to demonstrate their ability or intention to produce programmes with an Irish content, at the time of the application. It is unlikely in the present climate that the state or the courts would attempt to revoke an operator's licence over non-compliance with the pro-Irish 'spirit of the legislation'. It is on this understanding that licences were awarded to many new radio stations and one new television station during the 1990s.

It is very difficult to pinpoint precisely the moment when the decision was taken to establish a dedicated Irish-language television channel. Sporadic attempts to persuade the authorities to build an Irish service had occurred from as early as 1926 and Irish-language pressure groups, long dissatisfied with RTÉ's offerings, had been particularly active in the late 1980s. Between 1986 and 1987 one group actually broadcast some programmes from a 'pirate' television transmitter at Cnoc Mordáin in Conamara, which as Ó Ciosáin (1998:21) has highlighted, not only presented a bold challenge to the authorities but also showed that the Department of Finance's arguments throughout the earlier periods that the costs of setting up such a service and training technicians would be prohibitive were themselves spurious. Arguing that an Irish-language television service could be run cheaply may not have been a wise strategy, but the group's main idea was to demand the service as a right and to physically challenge the government to do something about it by taking the law into their own hands. The various campaign groups combined to form An Feachtas Náisiúnta Teilifíse [the National Television

Campaign] in 1989. With the change in the newly emerging state view by the early 1990s the campaigners were pushing at open doors. This was reinforced by two key ministers, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn (Minister for Communications 1991-3 and Minister for the Gaeltacht in an earlier government) and Michael D. Higgins (Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht in 1993-7, with a brief gap during a change in government) being Irish-speaking elected representatives from the constituency which contains the major Conamara Gaeltacht, itself home to An Feachtas Náisiúnta Teilifíse. This was not a revolutionary development on the European stage. Wales had already established S4C, which in a bizarre twist had even been coming into homes in parts of Ireland on multi-channel services. Scottish Gaelic had a television commissioning service. People were aware of Catalan and Basque television services in the Iberian peninsula, and even France appeared resolutely to be developing services in some of its 'regional' languages. The only really critical opposition seems to have come from RTÉ. In its reply to the 1995 Green Paper on Broadcasting, which effectively set up Teilifís na Gaeilge (TnaG) as a subsidiary of RTÉ, it welcomed the station because 'the Irish-speaking population requires for the health of its own public sphere a dedicated television channel of its own' (RTÉ 1995: 29). The company was, however, clearly resentful of the fact that it would be losing authority in programming decisions while still being required to provide one hour a day of programming in Irish and to share news and current affairs with the new channel.

RTÉ saw its Irish-language radio subsidiary Raidió na Gaeltachta as complementary, but obviously saw TG4 as potential competition and favoured a 'separate and independent status and management for Teilifís na Gaeilge' (RTÉ 1995: 28-9). This idea

fits well with the now dominant philosophy of separating Irish-language services and agencies from generalist state bodies. Having been given definition by the Broadcasting Act 2001, TG4 was finally separated from RTÉ on 1 April 2007. The independence of the channel was accompanied with increased government funding: €35.663 million for 2008. Broadcasting six hours of Irish-language programming every day in a full 24-hour schedule, the channel is widely identified as offering one of the best value for money services of its kind in Europe, and claims a 3 per cent viewership in the very crowded Irish television market. The future of Irish-language television and relations between broadcasting companies, like all other aspects of life in the Irish-language, will probably depend on the future goodwill of government and the civil service as well as of the companies themselves. It currently has full support across the political spectrum, and enjoys wide support as an entity even among those who rarely watch it.

### **Legal status, language services and rights**

Irish has had a central constitutional standing since independence. Article 4 of the 1922 Constitution proclaimed Irish as the 'National Language' of the Free State, recognizing English also as an 'official language'. The constitution currently in force, *Bunreacht na hÉireann* [Constitution of Ireland] of 1937, contains a more sophisticated formulation:

Article 8.

- 1 The Irish language as the national language is the first official language.
- 2 The English language is recognised as a second official language.
- 3 Provision may, however, be made by law for the exclusive use of either of the said languages for any or more official purposes, either throughout the state or in

any part thereof.

(Bunreacht na hÉireann, 1937)

Bunreacht na hÉireann is a bilingual document. The Irish text takes precedent in any dispute, and studies have shown that there is some divergence between the two (Ó Cearúil 1999, 2002). With regard to the status of Irish in law, however, it is setting out what was seen as the official situation in 1937. It is not a Bill of Rights for Irish speakers, nor does it openly express the desire to improve the position of Irish by encouraging its revival. These political-social aims are part of the long-standing ideology, but are not part of the state's Fundamental Law. The real legal position of Irish has been determined by jurisprudence. Ó Máille (1990: 1-20) has observed that the range and scope of the language rights of Irish speakers is actually quite narrow. Until the enactment of the Official Languages Act 2003, only court cases and judicial decisions have established what the position was. A person who wished to use Irish in court had a constitutional right to do so, but could not compel another party, including the judge, to do likewise. Persons wishing to conduct official business in Irish should not be put to additional expense for so doing. Official documentation must be available in both official languages, although the time limit set for producing a version in the second language was not set. The obligations of the state towards the Irish language in the important fields of broadcasting, education and publishing, to name but three fields, were not defined either by the Constitution or by legislation, and so a future governments could change the supportive position if it so wished.

It was in keeping with the compartmentalizing of policy evident since the early 1990s into linguistic rights and heritage issues that the state should seek to codify its own and

the citizen's rights and obligations in this area. Again it is possible to talk in terms of the state rather than simply the government, as although the 1997–2002 Fianna Fáil-led government set about drafting the legislation, from the outset it was guaranteed all-party support. The ideological consensus has been re-affirmed. The Bill to provide the Official Languages Act was a long time in gestation, having been promised before the 1997 general election and only published between the announcement of the May 2002 election and polling day. Despite being couched in the language of equality, the focus of the Bill was obviously the promotion of the official usage of Irish by framing the responsibilities of the state and of all the public companies and agencies under its power with regard to dealings with Irish speakers. The main aims are summarized as follows in the explanatory memorandum which was published with the Bill in April 2002:

*Purpose of Bill*

The general purpose of the Bill is to promote equality for the Irish and English languages as the official languages of the state and to provide for language rights of the citizen in his or her relationship with the state.

(Explanatory and Financial Memorandum

Official Language (Equality Bill), 2002)

The Official Languages Act was signed into law in July 2003. It covers the obligations of all public companies and bodies with regard to provision of services in Irish in three ways: statutory obligations, including written correspondence with the public and the production of information and annual reports; obligations under orders issued by the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs with regard to stationery, signage, oral announcements and advertising; obligations based on language schemes agreed

between the public body and the office of the Coimisinéir Teanga (the language commissioner, a post set up under the Act). The main emphasis is on these schemes as they determine the action of public bodies under the Act, and are audited. Walsh and McLeod (2008) offer an insightful analysis of the first wave of these schemes and the complex question of how they respond to perceived demands for Irish-language service, or might eventually stimulate it.

### **The future definition of the Gaeltacht**

This chapter has shown that the Gaeltacht has been a central part of the story of language management since the independence of the state. For ideological reasons it was loosely defined until 1956, when it was defined by Statutory Instrument for the purposes of giving a geographical area of responsibility to the Department of the Gaeltacht, and since 1979 to Údarás na Gaeltachta. Despite the actions of the state and the interest of the general population in the Gaeltacht, Irish has continued to decline as the major community language, and this is underlined by Mac Donnacha et al. (2005) in the state of Irish in schooling. I have argued (Ó hIfearnáin 2007, 2008) that language planning which focuses on national concerns has not been properly adapted for Gaeltacht settings, and although it has the aim of strengthening Irish as the home and community language, by its inappropriate application by emphasizing Irish-only usage for home and school and the use of the national standard variety in literacy practice without explaining this approach to the population, it may actually be having the opposite effect. Many of the factors which caused the decline in Irish ability and usage that have been documented since the nineteenth century are also still in play.

In response to a research commission from the Department of Community, Rural and



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Gaeltacht Affairs, Ó Giollagáin et al. (2007) produced recommendations for the future direction in Gaeltacht language policy. Statistical analysis of the percentage of daily Irish speakers from the census combined with the results of Scéim Labhairt na Gaeilge, a scheme which awards a grant to Irish-speaking households and which is subject to inspection from the ministry thus giving an indication of the real number of habitual Irish speakers, enabled the research team to identify three categories of Gaeltacht region, very similar to the schooling categories defined by Mac Donnacha et al. (2005). It was shown that there were broadly three community linguistic dynamics identifiable. In Category A regions, 67 per cent were daily speakers, Category B had 44 to 66 per cent daily speakers, and Category C had fewer. A number of statistical exercises showed this categorization to be robust. The report, which is currently being considered by a Cabinet committee, seeks to establish the Gaeltacht as areas of integrated language planning and management based on the needs of these communities, categorized by their daily speaker numbers. Such language management would entail the communities themselves, through various agencies, taking on responsibilities for plans that would have an impact on schooling, spatial planning, business, and language development schemes for home and community language practice. While it is not yet certain what the government – and indeed the Gaeltacht community – response will be to the proposals, the nature of the study illustrates the way in which the Irish state, through government and community agency, has now moved beyond the imposition of policy in the first stages of language management through an extended period in which policy was determined by perceived response to public demand, to the stimulation of demand from the Irish-speaking minority for provision to this final part of the current stage in

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language policy where communities are being invited to become the agents of their linguistic future. In order for the Irish-speaking communities to take on this role, be they in the Gaeltacht or spread throughout the country, they will need to develop their own mechanisms to instigate change. This is the greatest challenge and, paradoxically, will require intervention and facilitation by government on behalf of the people.

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#### FIGURE TITLES

*Figure 12.1* Irish speakers in Ireland. (Sources: As in Hindley (1990: 15) for 1799-1842 and census of population for 1851-2006.)

*Figure 12.2* The Gaeltacht (defined 1956-1982).

*Figure 12.3* Defining Gaeltacht: Múscraí, Co. Cork, 1956-1982. (Source: Statutory Instruments 21 of 1956 and 350 of 1982 National Archives File S15811B.) Outline map of the District Electoral Divisions (bold outlines) showing all townlands included in Gaeltacht Areas Orders, 21 September 1956 and 2 December 1982 which were:

- 1 Recommended as Gaeltacht in draft of 8 September 1956.
- 2 Recommended in draft to be kept under review for potential inclusion.
- 3 Included in Gaeltacht Areas Order of 21 September but not in the 8 September draft.
- 4 Added by Gaeltacht Areas Order, 2 December 1982.

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